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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[MR. CHEPSTOW TOOK OPEN THE ENVELOPE, AND HANDED THE NOTE TO KENNETH.]

TWO MISS DANES.

CHAPTER VII.

There seemed a strange blank in Kenneth's life when pretty captivating Alma had gone from Fountain-road.

It was very well for Mrs. Bartram to assure him the girl was heartless, and he had had a lucky escape.

Kenneth had loved too well and too intensely to take comfort yet. He had never dreamed of love until he had seen Alma, and from the day of their engagement he had never thought of any future unshared by her. No wonder all seemed desolate now she had forsaken him.

He had never been enthusiastically fond of his profession, and he could not turn to it to fill the void in his life. He did his duty, undertook all that was required of him; but it was in a dull, mechanical sort of way. It really seemed that all hope and energy had died out of him.

But, through it all, he never once regretted

his decision. If, indeed, Alma could forsake him because he was not rich, why, then, even if his heart broke, he was better off without her. He knew he had not asked her to share hardships or privations. If his love was not enough to satisfy her without wealth and grandeur, why, then, she would have made him a very poor sort of wife.

She was free—quite free. They were never likely even to meet again, for before Alma returned from her visit at Brighton, Kenneth would have left the Fountain-road, and there was little chance of his returning to visit the place where he had suffered so much. Still, Alma was to be away six weeks, and so there was no need for Kenneth to hurry himself in seeking a new abode.

Truth to say, in these days, he felt almost incapable of any unusual exertion. He did not even go to The Chestnuts; he felt he could not bear his mother's sympathy, or the comments of the girls. He just drifted on in a very miserable, listless state, which might have continued an indefinite time, had not an unexpected check come to his gloomy reserve.

"Mr. Chepstow wants to see you," said the

junior partner to Kenneth one morning, about ten days after that ill-fated expedition to the Crystal Palace. "You had better go to him at once."

Ken wondered if his indifference to everything had aroused the attention of his Chief and he was to receive an official rebuke.

He very seldom saw the senior partner. For many years past, old Mr. Chepstow had taken life easily. Now and again he would come to London to meet some influential client, now and again he would spend an hour discussing some knotty point of law with his partner; but, for the most part, Mr. Morgan was the presiding power at Pump Court, and, in all the years Kenneth had been with the firm, he could never before remember being summoned to a private interview with Owen Chepstow.

His fears of the Chief's displeasure faded at once. The old gentleman shook hands with him warmly, pointed to a seat opposite his own, and looked so generally urbane, that Kenneth, felt certain whatever he had been sent for, it was not to receive reproof.

"Your father's name was Cyril, I believe,"

began Mr. Chepstow, suddenly, "and you are his only son. Am I right?"

"Perfectly," replied Kenneth, rather surprised at the question. "But my father has been dead nearly thirty years, and he left England in 1847."

"Yes. We were schoolfellows—your father and myself—Mr. Dane. It always seemed a strange coincidence that his son should come into my office; but I have kept my eye on you for my old friend's sake."

Kenneth wondered what was coming next. He smiled rather sadly, and said, simply,—

"I am afraid, sir, my father did not leave many friends in the old county. You are the first person I ever met who spoke of him. My mother was deeply attached to him; but she never refers to her first-married life. I have often feared she suffered too much from poverty to be able to speak of those early days."

"I think she made a mistake," said the old lawyer, quietly. "When she came back to England, she should have communicated with your father's relations, and have allowed them a chance of knowing you. As it is, I believe the news I have to give you will be an unmitigated surprise."

"I always understood I had no relations."

"Don't you ever read the papers, my boy?" demanded Mr. Chepstow. "Didn't you see in yesterday's *Times* the death of Sir Geoffrey Dane, of Danes Croft?"

"I never read the births, deaths, and marriages," confessed Kenneth; "and if I did, it would not have occurred to me to claim Sir Geoffrey as a kinsman."

"Well, you had better be enlightened at once. He was your father's only brother, and from the moment he died you became Sir Kenneth Dane. Unfortunately, the property can descend in the female line, so that you won't gain much by an empty title."

"A title I shall never claim," said the young man, simply. "There would be something unseemly in one of your clerks being 'Sir Kenneth.'"

"There's something besides the title," said the other. "Not much; only an old farmhouse and two hundred acres of land. All the other property must go to Sir Geoffrey's grandchild; but, it seems, some dead and gone baronet was afflicted with a fear that one of his successors might be left with an empty title, and so he invested his savings in this little homestead, and tied it up so that it must always go to the reigning baronet. It's a good way from Danes Croft. Perhaps the old gentleman thought it as well to separate the inheritors of the title and the estate, if ever these had to be divided. Anyway, it's a pretty little place, and it brings in five or six hundred a-year; so I expect, 'Sir Kenneth,' you will be deserting us and retiring to a rural life!"

Ken found his voice at last.

"Are you quite sure?"

"My dear fellow, I am quite sure that you are Cyril Dane's son. My friend, Hubert Clifford, was your uncle's legal adviser, and, as soon as I saw Sir Geoffrey's death in the paper, I dropped Clifford a line to say that I could oblige him with the address of the new Baronet. I guessed pretty well Mrs. Monteith had kept you in ignorance of your family history, and I came up to town this morning on purpose to enlighten you. For your position as the last of the Danes the income from Woodlake is a bagatelle; but I've been told you are thinking of matrimony, and this windfall may smooth your way. If you liked, you know, you could let Woodlake for a good rent. It is entailed, and so you can't sell it. But anyway, it is something to possess a freehold property of your own."

"And I always wanted to be a farmer," breathed Kenneth, eagerly. "I think I shall leave the law, and settle down to till my own acres."

Owen Chepstow smiled.

"But what about the young lady? Young

girls are sometimes fond of London life and its pleasures."

"There is no lady in the case, Mr. Chepstow."

"Why, I'm sure I heard you were engaged."

"I was engaged," said Ken, with a painful stress upon the second word, "but the lady wished me to accept an allowance from my mother, and—I could not."

"Well, here's the 'allowance' ready to hand, so perhaps she will change her mind, specially with the chance of a title. I can tell you, Sir Kenneth, 'Lady Dane' will have a very pleasant ring in a young girl's ears."

Kenneth shook his head.

"It's too late, sir."

"Well, will you take a week's leave of absence to think over your plans? You ought to go to your uncle's funeral, and then you will have to inspect your new property. Even if you decide to remain with us you will want a few days to yourself."

At that moment a junior clerk brought in a letter which had just come.

Mr. Chepstow tore open the envelope, glanced at its contents, and then handed the note to Kenneth.

It was very short, just thanking the lawyer for his information, and begging him to invite Sir Kenneth Dane to come to his uncle's funeral; but, like many another letter, the gist was in the postscript.

"Mr. Olive begs me to say he hopes Sir Kenneth will come on Friday and sleep at the Rectory. The mistress of Danes Croft being a personal stranger to me, I shrink from offering the hospitality of her house to anyone. Please explain this to your friend."

"What does he mean?" asked Kenneth.

"It is an old story now. Sir Geoffrey was married twice, and, as a kind of judgment on him for tempting fate a second time, he had to leave the daughter of his old age in comparative poverty, while all his wealth goes to the child of the son whom he hated."

Kenneth opened his eyes.

"Surely a man could not hate his own son?"

"Oh, it is true enough. Danes Croft was mortgaged almost to the hilt when Sir Geoffrey married a City heiress, whose money cleared the place. I don't think it was his fault. He was a fine specimen of an English country gentleman, but she was jealous and exacting. She never tired of taunting him with her wealth, and so they led a cat-and-dog sort of life, and, when she died, her family goaded him into letting them bring up the child. I was invited to Danes Croft for the heir's coming of age, and I can tell you, my boy, it was a sorry sight. A small, undersized youth with a lisp, and nothing brave or manly about him. No wonder it was a bitter day for his father. He and his beautiful young wife tried to make things go off well, but they must have felt humiliated to think that miserable cad was the next Baronet, and richer even than, through his mother, than any of the Danes had been for centuries."

"And I suppose he died young?"

"He married his cousin, another City heiress like his mother, and they had three children, though only the eldest lived. When this baby was two years old, to the surprise of everyone, Lady Dane had a child—a daughter. These two girls with yourself, Sir Kenneth, are the last of the family. The two Miss Danes are aunt and niece. Contrary to all precedent, the aunt is the younger of the two, and by far the poorer."

"And are they grown up?"

"The mistress of Danes Croft is twenty-two, her aunt just twenty. They are both your cousins."

"And I have never seen either of them in my life."

"You must not blame Sir Geoffrey for that. I know he offered to befriend you on your father's death. Your mother not only refused, but she never let him know of her second marriage and return to England. He

said to me once (it was before I knew you) he supposed the next Baronet was growing up in the wilds of Australia; but that as there was but little save the title for him to inherit, it was as well he should earn his own living."

"I shall go down to Otterley to-morrow, I daresay there is an hotel there of some sort, for I should not like to trespass on Mr. Olive!"

"You need not be afraid; the living is a good one, and the present Rector has been there for years. He is (I mean he was) a great friend of Sir Geoffrey."

"I must see my mother before I go. Mr. Chepstow, I feel I have thanked you very poorly, for all the trouble you have taken."

"Nonsense; I am glad to have been of some use to my old friend's son. You must not judge your mother harshly because she kept you aloof from Sir Geoffrey. I think, myself, she loved you so dearly she could not bear the idea of parting from you; and Mr. Monteith, though a rich man, would gladly have shifted the charge of you on to Sir Geoffrey's shoulders, had he only known of the relationship."

"Do you mean he did not know of it?"

"I am sure he did not!"

"But you know, and Mr. Monteith was fairly intimate with you?"

"Lawyers don't betray secrets," said Mr. Chepstow with a quaint smile, "and though we managed Mr. Monteith's affairs for over five and twenty years, I don't think he was ever a friend of mine."

Kenneth sighed.

"I tried hard to like him and to be grateful for his real kindness, and yet, since he has been dead, I have felt more at home at the Chestnuts than I ever could before!"

Mr. Chepstow nodded.

"You see, your own father was a gentleman; poor Monteith was a self-made man. Try as he would to assume the manners and customs of a rank above him, he never quite achieved it. There were always places where the artificial veneer wore off and showed the natural selfishness within. He was bitterly disappointed because he had no son of his own. He never took to you, because he felt you belonged by birth to the class he always tried to imitate, and because he felt, too, you were dearer to your mother than either of her other children."

"I always felt he never liked me," said Kenneth, "and that is why, since I first started to earn my own living, I have always refused any help from him."

"And so you even broke off your engagement rather than yield your pride?"

"Do you blame me, sir?"

The old man hesitated.

"If a girl had been used to luxury she might find it hard to begin married life on three hundred a-year, she would miss many things she had been accustomed to in her father's house; and it is possible that, seeing you at Mrs. Monteith's, she expected your means were larger."

"She never entered my mother's house until she went there as my betrothed, and she saw me first in her own home. She was my landlady's niece, Mr. Chepstow, and her aunt thought three hundred a-year an ample income to begin life upon."

"Your landlady's niece?"

"You must not blame her," said Ken, warmly. "She was the prettiest creature I ever saw. More like a fairy than anything else. We were thrown together, and I thought I could make her happy. She had not a sixpence of her own, and though she had tried to earn her own living by teaching in a French school, the principal thought her too young, and sent her home. She was dependent on her aunt for everything, and I believed I could give her a better home than the one I found her in. We were engaged two years, and had planned to be married next September, till she found out I had refused my mother's help!"

"And she threw you over for that?"

"Not quite," said Ken, sadly. "She

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offered a compromise. If I was too proud to let my mother buy me a partnership, Alma herself would accept a housekeeping allowance from her which I need know nothing about. In my surprise I spoke angrily and told her my wife must accept nothing I did not earn, and then it came out that she had always expected Mr. Menteth to leave me a legacy, and that, failing that, she thought it my mother's duty to provide for me."

"And she was your landlady's niece?"
"It is all over," said Ken, gravely. "I have not spoken of it yet even to my mother; only, Mr. Chepstow, perhaps it will make you understand why I am thankful for Woodlake. To go on here, where everything reminds me of my lost hopes, is almost torture. I believe I have it in me to make a successful farmer. Far away in the country, among fresh faces and new scenes, at least, I shall be spared constant memories of the days that are gone."

"How old are you?" asked the old lawyer, rather gravely.

"Thirty-four!"
"You've time before you to get over your mistake and choose afresh," said the old man, kindly; "and you must remember, Sir Kenneth, you owe something to your name. Choose a wife worthy to be Lady Dane, and don't be caught by a mere pretty face."

"I shall never marry!"

"We won't dispute over that yet. Tell Hubert Clifford I got his letter, and you are the reply to it. I hope you will like your kinswomen, Sir Kenneth; but it seems to me impossible you can be on friendly terms with both. From what I have heard of the family history, I should say that friendship between the two Miss Dances was a thing impossible, and that their acquaintance will have to take their choice, and range themselves on one side or the other!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE to face they stood—the new mistress of Dances Croft, and the girl who all her life had ruled there. The one beautiful, even in her plain black dress and with her tired grief-worn face; the other resplendent in a blue and gold travelling cloak—her features triumphant in their delight at taking possession of her birthright, and yet with a strange malicious look upon her face as she gazed upon her aunt.

It was an awkward moment for them all. May's welcome died on her lips as she realized that Honor was even more terrible than her expectations.

Mrs. Clive hardly liked to be the first to speak, and finally it was Mrs. Dane who broke the silence. Putting out her hand to Sir Geoffrey's daughter, she said, kindly,—

"I think you must be my sister-in-law, though I am sure I look old enough to be your mother. I am afraid you did not expect us to-night; but Honor thought it best to start as soon as she heard of her grandfather's death."

May's reply was inaudible, for the heiress drowned it by her blunt statement,—

"I did not come because I thought it right, but because I chose. I am the mistress of this place, and I thought if I did not look after my rights, I might find the house stripped of everything. Where is the housekeeper?"

Mrs. Marton came forward. She was an old woman, and had been in the service of the Dances full fifty years; but she felt ashamed of the family when Honor said, haughtily, to her,—

"Let the best suite of rooms be prepared for me, and send up supper at once. You had better send someone to show me the way upstairs!"

Mrs. Marton answered in a low voice; she wanted, if possible, to spare her dear Miss May from hearing what she said.

"Sir Geoffrey rests in the state rooms, madam. It has always been the custom of the house for each baronet to stay there in his own chamber till he's carried to his grave."

"I suppose I must put up with the next best then!"

"Miss Dane has those, madam."
"I am Miss Dane," said Honor, haughtily, "and your mistress. I will thank you to remember that! I shall, of course, have the rooms you speak of. My aunt can have others if she chooses to remain my uninvited guest!"

Honor had not imitated the housekeeper in lowering her voice. Every word was distinctly audible, not only to May, but to everyone in the hall. Nancy Dane seized the hand of Sir Geoffrey's daughter, and cried, eagerly,—

"You must not be hurt, my dear. Honor does not mean to wound you, but she is always so masterful."

May gave one imploring glance at Mrs. Clive, and clung to her in piteous silence. Fortunately the Rector's wife was quite equal to the occasion.

"I am going home at once," she said, addressing herself to Mrs. Dane, and pointedly ignoring Honor; "and I will take my young friend with me. Believe me, madam, in her desire to remain under this roof while it still shelters her dead father, we never imagined she was exposing herself to insult!"

"She can stay," said Honor, coldly, "so long as she does not interfere with my authority!"

"You'd better stay, my dear," pleaded Mrs. Dane. "I will do my best to make things smooth for you."

May turned to the elder lady. Like Mrs. Clive, she could not bring herself to speak to Honor.

"I thank you very much, madam; but it is better for me to go. Mrs. Clive will take care of me, and I shall see my father in heaven!"

"Most unlikely," struck in Honor, "considering all I have heard of Sir Geoffrey!"

A voice or two cried "shame," but May did not even seem to hear the cruel taunt.

In perfect silence she waited while the maid brought her walking things and those of Mrs. Clive; then she turned to leave the old house which had sheltered her from her birth. To her surprise Hubert Clifford was at her other side.

"I throw myself on your hospitality, Mrs. Clive," he said, gravely. "After what I have heard to-night I will not further trespass here. I must come to Dances Croft once again to read Sir Geoffrey's will; but then my visits to the old place are ended for ever. I will send the papers connected with your estate to any lawyer you name, madam," he said, abruptly, turning to Honor; "but I wash my hands of your affairs for ever!"

"I am very glad to hear it," said Honor, promptly. "It saves me the trouble of dismissing you, Mr. Clifford."

Every servant in the house had gathered in the hall, drawn there by the report of what was going on.

A smothered chorus of "Heaven bless you, miss!" broken by choked sobs, sounded as May passed through the doorway.

She leaned on Mrs. Clive's arm. Hubert Clifford followed them with a lantern. May's maid would collect his things and those of the two ladies and send them to the Rectory in the morning. They did not wait now even to think of this.

A dead silence followed May's departure.

Mrs. Dane, weak and frightened at what had occurred, sat down on the stairs and began to cry.

Honor, without a sign of regret or shame, addressed herself again to the housekeeper.

"Show my maid the rooms you spoke of, and she will arrange my things there. Send up supper at once. It is getting late."

Mrs. Marton was ready with her answer.

"Certainly, Miss Dane. And, please, I should like to leave Dances Croft in a month's time if you will kindly suit yourself."

"And I should like to leave when Mrs. Marton does," said the butler, promptly.

"We're old-fashioned people here, miss, and not used to new ways."

Honor winced, for she took the words to be a cut at her own status. Although the child of John Dane, and so descended on one side quite as highly as May, this young woman was always tormented by a secret fear that people set her down as a parvenu.

Every servant at Dances Croft had followed the butler's example before the heiress and her mother at last found themselves seated at supper.

Honor looked round her with ill-concealed satisfaction.

Never had she sat in a finer room. It was good enough for a royal banqueting hall, and the furniture was worthy of it.

As she surveyed the old Turkey carpet, the massive carved oak furniture and the pictures—most of them known works of art—which nearly covered the walls, she gave a sigh of content.

At last she had come into her kingdom. No one could think of her henceforward as simply her mother's possible heiress. She was more now than merely the child of a rich woman. She was Miss Dane of Dances Croft. This splendid mansion with its ancient glories was hers. Nothing in all the world could rob her of her heritage.

And for the first time that night a softer emotion stirred her heart as she thought of this.

Honor had a heart, though she rarely showed it. She cared for herself first and above all else, but of late she had learned what love meant. So far as a thoroughly selfish nature could love, she loved Robert Tracey.

She had treated May with almost brutal rudeness because she feared the girl's beauty might charm Lord Tracey's artistic eye when he came to Dances Croft, because she could not forget the interest with which he had spoken of his little playfellow.

Honor meant to marry Rupert; and that object once accomplished, she might perhaps be less heartless to her aunt.

Just now she had room but for one thought. This grand old place was hers. She could give Lord Tracey a home as ancient as the one whose loss he dreaded. Surely her wealth, her broad acres, her ancestral mansion—ay, and her love, too—must win his heart.

Honor's first meal in her new home was almost a silent one. Mrs. Dane sat at the table, but she never spoke unless her daughter said something which absolutely demanded an answer.

It was passing strange that of these two women the one who had no drop of Sir Geoffrey's blood in her veins felt far more kindly to his orphan child than the other who was at least half a Dane.

Nancy might have repulsed the Baronet's advances years ago. She might be unrefined and of only mediocre intelligence, but she had a mother's heart, which positively ached when she thought of the girl Honor had driven forth that night from her childhood's home.

"What shall we do next?" inquired Miss Dane, when even her healthy appetite was satisfied. "I should like to go all over the house, but I suppose it is too late."

"Far too late," replied her mother. "It must be long past ten. I am very tired, Honor, and I should be glad to go to bed."

The old housekeeper came in to show the ladies to their rooms. She was perfectly respectful and attentive to her new mistress. Having relieved her feelings by giving notice, she was quite willing to show every civility to her temporary employer.

"This is your room, madam," she said to Honor, opening the door of the chamber which had been May's, "and I thought Mrs. Dane would like the one next to it. Being such a large house, it will be pleasant for her to feel she is close to you, specially when there's death so near."

Mrs. Dane shuddered. She was not without a tinge of superstition, and she felt terrified at the idea of passing the night so near the dead man whose dearest wishes Honor was outraging.

"Very well," replied the younger lady, sharply, "and you must find a place for my maid near, please."

The two rooms opened on to each other. In years gone by the farther one had been occupied by May's governess; since she left the Croft it had been kept for the girl's favourite friends. It had been a whim of hers that it should always be ready to receive them.

"You will let me leave the door open, Honor?" pleaded her mother, when Mrs. Marton had departed. "I shall not sleep a wink in this dreary old place if I do not feel there is someone human near me."

"Your light will disturb me," said Honor, crossly, "and I thought you said you were so sleepy."

She closed the door as she spoke, and poor Nancy Dane found herself alone. She had never trained her child to be unselfish, and for years Honor had taken her own way even when it crossed her mother's; but to-night the heartlessness of her daughter seemed almost more than the poor woman could bear, and Mrs. Dane shed some bitter tears before she even attempted to prepare for rest.

"There will harm come of it," she whispered to herself, when at last she dried her eyes and began to undress. "My husband was never happy at the Croft, he used to say the very air of the place stifled him. Honor seems to like it, but it will bring her sorrow."

The room was prettily furnished, and over the mantelpiece hung a large coloured portrait of Sir Geoffrey. That picture was a sore trial to his daughter-in-law; try as she would, it seemed to her she could not escape the gaze of those searching grey eyes. The likeness was what it seemed, a "speaking one," and the face, which she had seen but once in life, now seemed to poor Nancy to watch her every movement with angry care. Poor woman! never was a more reluctant invader brought to a strange country than she had been to enter Dances Croft. Long, long ago, with her husband at her side, she might have gloried in taking possession of the beautiful old place, but, for three long years, the very name of Dances Croft had been enough to make the widow miserable.

"He looks as if he knew everything," she murmured to herself, as she glanced wretchedly at the picture. "Oh, I wish I had told him. But it seemed impossible to do it while he was alive; and now it is too late. I would give every penny I have that he might know it. Honor is my own child, and I owe a duty to her; but I know harm will come of it, there never yet was a wrong which went unpunished."

She crept into bed, and tried in vain to sleep; but the strange room and the unfamiliar furniture gave her an unusual feeling of wakefulness. Try as she would, she could not find repose. It was not till the short summer night was waning, and the first streaks of red were visible in the East, that poor Mrs. Dane at last fell into an uneasy slumber—a slumber which was to prove almost worse than her former wakefulness, for there came to her a dream so terrible that the bare recollection of it in after years was enough to turn her faint with horror, and so vivid and life-like in its details that when she awoke she could hardly believe it had not really happened.

She thought that in a strange town, where she had never been before, a scaffold was erected, and that a crowd of people outside the jail discussed the condemned woman's youth and rank, and the crime for which she was about to suffer; and while Mrs. Dane stood there spell-bound, chained to the spot by some power stronger than herself, and yet feeling no interest in the talk that went on around her, Sir Geoffrey suddenly appeared, Sir Geoffrey with the still set features of the dead,

with glassy eyes and cold ghostly hands which made her shiver when he touched her.

"Come, see your work," he said, in a sepulchral voice, and the crowd made way for them, while, against her own will, constrained still by that nameless power, Mrs. Dane followed her spectral guide on and on, through the barred gates of the prison to that fatal spot where the scaffold was even now waiting for its victim.

"Look at her well," breathed that strange weird voice: "your work brought her here."

And then, oh! the horror of it! she saw her own daughter, her only child Honor, led forth, her arms and hands closely bound, and the truth dawned at last on the wretched mother. This was the murderer for whom the world outside had whispered hanging was too good.

"Have pity!" she besought a tall man of superior bearing to the others, and who seemed in authority over them, "Have pity, she is so young!"

And then they told her of Honor's crime, of how, with her own hands, in cold blood, she had murdered the last of her kindred, a young girl of wondrous beauty, who was to have been married the day she met her death. The bridegroom waited in the church for his bride, while Honor's cruel hand sent her to the land where marriages are not.

"Have pity!" pleaded the wretched mother in vain, and then, above the babel of the crowd, she heard Sir Geoffrey's voice again.

"Woman, be silent! This is your work. You know that your child hated mine. A word from you would have saved my darling, and given her back her happiness! It was not spoken, and you have your reward."

The signal was given. Another moment all would have been over, when, with one terrible cry, poor Mrs. Dane awoke.

Her one thought was her child. Was that awful dream really prophetic of evil? Had harm really befallen Honor? Trembling in every limb from the terror of the last half-hour, Mrs. Dane went to the door which led to her daughter's room. It was unlocked and she entered hastily. Honor lay calmly asleep. One arm supported her head, the other was stretched in careless ease outside the counterpane. She was perfectly peaceful; nothing had disturbed or alarmed her. Nancy was not a religious woman, but she fell on her knees then, and thanked Heaven for its mercy.

Poor mother! Little she recked then there would come a day when she might regret Honor had not died in the first hours of her coming to Dances Croft—when with all her heart she would have been thankful to be able to think of her child as safe from sin and sorrow in the Land of the Dead.

(To be continued.)

ALETHEA'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—(continued.)

"Be calm, Alethea; you will exhaust yourself," pleaded Layne. "My groom went to the ruins, and if Arthur had been there he will learn the fact!"

"We should have more men engaged in the search; I will send out my servants."

"And so excite the curiosity of your guests as well as dependents. You are not acting with your usual caution, dear Alethea. The child will soon be found—I expected to find him here with you. There is no cause for alarm."

Alethea became more calm, and said, resolutely,—

"When you find him, Richard, you must let me know on the instant. And you must bring him to me to-night. I cannot let him be away from me longer. You may make what-

ever excuses you can for the absence of your nephew, but I must have him back again. Oh, the agonies I have endured since I gave him up to you—the sleepless nights I have passed, and the long and desolate days! I can never part with him again. My boy! My beautiful boy!"

She sobbed unrestrainedly.

Richard Layne's eyes were full of tears, and his voice trembled as he said,—

"Dear Alethea, I loved him too. I tried to make him happy. I was tender and gentle with him, as I would have been with a baby. I fear you blame me for his disappearance."

"No, Richard, I blame no one but myself. If I had but smiled upon him, or returned his pretty look he would have been safe at this moment. I know you loved him, Richard, and that you were a father to him. Do not blame yourself, for I alone have erred."

She spoke with such a heartbroken tone that Richard's heart ached for her.

"You had better join personally in the search for him, Richard," continued Miss Wyoherry. "My heart is full of impatience and restlessness. I should feel better if I knew that you were in the saddle!"

She lifted her head wearily from his shoulder, and looked into his face with such despair that Layne knew, without being told, that she believed her son to be for ever lost to her.

Without a word, he started to leave the grotto.

"Wait one moment, Richard!" said the lady. "Offer immense rewards, if necessary. Follow up those tramps we saw. You can take with you as many of my servants as you think best. It will not be considered strange that I should sympathize with you in the loss of your nephew. And, Richard, keep me informed of your progress. If harm has come to my child, do not hesitate to let me know the truth at once. This suspense is terrible!"

"I will do as you say, Alethea. For Arthur's sake, keep up. Don't give way as you are doing now! Wherever he is, the child is quite safe!"

With this consoling remark, which failed to comfort himself, Richard Layne went out.

Miss Wyoherry then covered her face with her hands.

The anguish that filled her soul was betrayed only by faint shudders now and then. She gave way to neither tears nor sobs; she did not moan or wail—her grief was too deep for such outward expression.

What she thought and felt as she lay there with shrouded face was never known save to her own soul and its Maker.

An hour passed, another, and another, and then she looked up with a sad, wild face, and murmured faintly to herself.

The sound of her own voice seemed to arouse her, and she arose, drew about her the mantle of Spanish lace that draped her form, and quitted the grotto, walking blindly, as if a film had gathered over her vision.

The fresh air seemed to revive her in part, and she proceeded in the shadow of the trees, towards the Castle, anxious to gain the privacy of her own apartments.

She had passed over scarcely half the distance when she encountered Lord Waldemere.

His lordship had been walking about for some time in full view of the grotto, consumed with jealous rage because Richard Layne was holding an interview there with Alethea.

He knew that he was there for the purpose of breaking the news of Arthur's disappearance, but he envied him the happiness of soothing the grief of the young mother, of inspiring her with hope, of holding her hand, and caressing her.

He could only comfort himself with the reflection that the loss of Arthur must be a grief which caresses could not subdue, and which loving words could scarcely alleviate.

When Richard Layne issued from the grotto, bowed down as under a heavy burden, the Marquis rejoiced, muttering,—

"He feels the loss of his nameless son. should like to see how Alethea bears it."

But his patience was almost exhausted during his three hours of waiting for her.

He fancied her fainting and ill, and started once or twice to go to the grotto; then checked himself with an impatient exclamation, and took a seat under an acacia tree, pretending to be absorbed in a book which he held upside down.

But when Alethea made her appearance, he was surprised to see so little change in her.

She walked more slowly than usual, and he noticed she had a weary, worn-out air, but her eyes were not red nor swollen with weeping.

"Her heart must be of stone," he muttered. He approached her so as to intercept her path, and saluted her with a good morning.

Miss Wycherly returned the salutation. At sight of him, she regained her usual coldness and hauteur, and her countenance was as proud and impassive as ever as she paused for him to move aside.

It was singular that she did not suspect Lord Waldemere of being concerned in the disappearance of the boy, but she did not. Her mind was so preoccupied with thoughts of her own apparent coldness to little Arthur, that she did not even recall the threats of the Marquis to wound her through her son.

His lordship had been prepared for reproaches and accusations from her, and he was accordingly surprised that he did not receive them.

"This is a delightful day, Miss Wycherly," he observed, carelessly.

"Is it?" she returned, wearily. "I had not noticed the weather."

"Your excursion yesterday fatigued you greatly, did it not?" inquired the Marquis.

"You are not looking well this morning."

"I am not feeling very well."

She stepped forward, waving his lordship from her path, but he did not move.

"Permit me a moment's conversation with you, Miss Wycherly," he said. "It is with regard to your invited guest, Sir Wilton Werner. I will be frank enough with you to say that I came here somewhat upon his account. I heard him mention in town that he expected to become your husband. That remark brought me to the Castle, your unwelcome and uninvited guest."

Alethea bowed.

"My stay here has been lengthened by hearing that Layne was in the neighbourhood. I was considerably astonished to find that he had been living here years, entirely upon your account, and that your relations with him were so intimate that your own niece, the Lady Leopold, had contracted the habit of calling him 'Uncle Richard.'"

"Well?"

"A longer stay has given me a keener insight into your affairs. I find that Sir Wilton Werner was not engaged to you at the moment he made the remark that aroused my indignation. I find that you and Richard Layne have quarrelled, or agreed to give each other up. I find that he aspires to the hand of the Lady Ellen Haigh, and that you encourage the attentions of Werner. I was in the conservatory the evening the Baronet proposed to you, and I must say that you acted your part well. No timid child of fifteen could have shown more hesitancy or less knowledge of her own heart than you when you solicited time to consider his offer," and the Marquis sneered.

"I see nothing wrong in all that, my lord, except your eavesdropping, which was certainly unworthy a gentleman," returned Alethea, coolly.

The Marquis coloured, and remarked,—

"I doubted that you would accept Sir Wilton, Miss Wycherly, for he does not seem to me to possess the qualities that would win a lady's affections. His early manhood was marked by dissoluteness and stained by many acts from which a true gentleman would recoil. At least, popular report so says. But yesterday your marked preference for him and

his triumphant manner convinced me that your long-delayed answer had been given at last, and that you had promised yourself to him in marriage."

"I am free to dispose of myself as I like, I suppose?"

"You are, indeed. But are you really engaged to him, Alethea?"

"I decline answering your question," was the haughty response.

"Then I shall interpret your silence as I please."

"Certainly; you can do as you like. At present," and Miss Wycherly's voice faltered and became uneven, "I am not able to converse farther with you upon the subject. I have a great sorrow that unfits me to defend myself, or even to care what may be said against me."

At this allusion to Arthur's disappearance, the Marquis betrayed a self-consciousness, looking confused.

Miss Wycherly was too absorbed in her own grief to notice it.

Lord Waldemere stepped aside, a satisfied look appearing for a single moment in his eyes, and permitted her to pass on.

She went on towards the eastern tower, and he proceeded to the drawing room.

Admitting herself at the private door, Alethea ascended the secret staircase, passed into her inner chamber, and ascended to the secret suite of rooms that had been occupied by her son during his stay at the Castle.

Here she spent the day in solitude.

She stationed herself by one of the ivy-screened windows, in the intervals of her frenzied pacing to and fro, and watched keenly for the coming of a messenger with tidings.

But she shed no tears.

A stony calm came over her, making her seem more than ever the iceberg she had been called.

Alison brought up her luncheon and was frightened at her singular manner. Miss Wycherly explained to her its cause, and the old waiting-woman wept and bemoaned the disappearance of her mistress's son, and Alethea envied her the power of expressing her sorrow.

"As for me," she said, simply passing her hand wearily over her brows, "I cannot weep. I seem turned to stone!"

She left her food untouched, and went back to the window, while Alison wept for her mistress as well as young Arthur.

Thus the afternoon passed.

It was nearly sunset, and the western sky had begun to be illumined with clouds of crimson and amber, when the keen eyes of Miss Wycherly beheld a horseman approaching the lodge from the direction of Richard Layne's.

As he turned into the avenue, she saw that he was not Richard, but his groom, and in fevered haste she sent old Alison down to the front portico to intercept his message.

"Arthur cannot have been found," she murmured, anxiously, "or Richard would have brought the news. It may be, she added, with sudden hope, "that the groom discovered my boy at the ruins, and that Richard is still absent in another direction!"

The minutes that passed before Alison returned seemed like hours.

When she came at last, she brought in her hand a letter.

"There was no message but that, my lady," she said, placing the missive in her hands.

Miss Wycherly tore open the envelope and unfolded the sheet it contained.

The note was from Richard Layne. He stated that nothing had yet been found or heard of Arthur; that he had not been seen at the ruins; that the tramps who had bivouacked there had vanished, and that he should set out in search of them instantly.

"He is lost—my boy is lost to me for ever!" said Miss Wycherly, giving the note into Alison's hands. "We have seen him for the last time, Alison. Oh, my boy, my son!"

The last word was breathed very faintly, and it was scarcely uttered when Alethea took a step forward towards her old nurse, stumbled, and fell senseless into Alison's outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE morning broke clear and beautiful over the Fens.

The air blew softly over the flower-sprinkled moor, bearing with it a balmy fragrance as pure as delicious.

This gentle breeze found its way into Natalie's bed-chamber, through her open window, and lifted the golden tendrils of her hair, caressed her pale cheeks, and aroused her anew to life and its burdens.

With an unconscious sigh, she opened her blue eyes and looked around her.

She had been visited by a strange, sweet dream, and the awakening from it was now pleasant.

In her sleep she had imagined herself the presiding genius of a beautiful home, where loving attentions were heaped upon her, where loving eyes watched over her, and where a loving heart depended for happiness upon her smiles.

The home she had pictured was not the lofty mansion of Lord Templecombe's ancestral home, nor was his the love of which she had dreamed.

Instead of grandeur, she had dreamed of a greystone farmhouse, with steep pitched roofs, gable windows, rustic porches—one of those charming homes where the beautiful combines with the useful—and he whom she imagined as sharing that home was Hugh Fauld.

As she awakened and recalled her dream, her cheeks flushed and she murmured,—

"How could I have had such a dream, when I have no such fancies when awake? How could I have dreamed such a thing when I am the wife of another?"

Again she sighed, and a shadow overspread her face.

Without attempting to analyse her feelings, she sprang from her bed, and commenced her toilet.

When this had been accomplished she flung open her windows to admit the breeze, and proceeded to pack her trunk, that she might be in readiness to depart.

When this had been done, she descended to the portico, and seated herself upon the steps, looking upon the pleasant moor, and avoiding the sight of the marsh and the rullen river in which she had so nearly terminated her existence the previous evening.

She had sat thus some time in a state of dreamy unconsciousness, enjoying the sunlight, the fragrance, and the bird-music, when she was joined by Linnet, who seated herself humbly at Natalie's feet, looking up into her face with affectionate gaze.

"Natalie looks troubled," she said, sympathizingly. "Tell Linnet what troubles her. Has anyone looked cross at Natalie?"

The young wife replied in the negative, and Linnet resumed,—

"Shall we walk among the flowers and birds now, Natalie? They are all happy this morning, because the sun smiles on them."

"We will not go this morning, Linnet," said Natalie, gently. "I think we shall never go over the moor again together. I must leave you!"

"Leave me, Natalie?" and Linnet's eyes filled with tears, and a frightened, sad expression gathered in her face. "What has Linnet done?"

It required all the tact at Natalie's command to soothe the suddenly awakened grief of the "daft girl," and she carefully avoided betraying to her her intended departure, deeming it best to take her leave suddenly.

By the time she had succeeded in recalling the smile to Linnet's mouth, she became aware of the approach of Hugh Fauld, who

had come very near to the Fens without having been observed.

The sound of wheels first caught her attention, and on perceiving the vehicle, whose approach they announced, she arose and went down to the gate, which she flung hospitably open.

A minute later, Hugh Fauld drove into the garden.

He bowed to her gravely, scanning her face earnestly for signs of mental or physical suffering, and then sprang from his seat and walked beside her to the porch, guiding his horses as he went.

His manner had greatly changed since the previous evening.

He had evidently struggled with himself and come off conqueror, for his manner was that of a father or elder brother, and his glances were calm and grave, with nothing of his great love for her manifest in them.

Natalie felt a strange sense of relief as she noticed this change—but she also felt a pang of disappointment.

Rebuking herself for this feeling, she passed on to the portico, while Hugh took care of his horses.

He soon returned to her, and was introduced to Linnet, for whose presence Natalie was thankful, as the Earl's deserted wife felt a singular embarrassment in the presence of her discarded lover.

She could not resist the conviction that she had flung away the rough but genuine diamond for mere glittering paste, and, despite all her efforts, the thought would return—if Hugh had only made his love known to her before Lord Templecombe had come to trouble her existence!

Her embarrassment was soon dissipated under the fatherly manner of Hugh, and she felt quite at her ease when old Elspeth sounded the breakfast-bell.

He gave her his arm and conducted her into the dining-room, placing her in her chair, and taking his seat opposite, in the most matter-of-course way, not betraying in the least the joyful thrill it gave him to feel the pressure of her hand upon his arm, or to sit where he could feast his eyes upon her fair and delicate face.

They lingered over their coffee and toast, Hugh desiring to prolong the meal as much as possible, as it might be the last at which they should ever sit together, and Natalie desiring to defer to the latest moment her parting with poor Linnet.

But the repast terminated at last.

There was no longer an excuse for trifling with the dainties before them, and they were about to arise when Linnet entered.

Natalie beckoned the girl, who obeyed the summons with similar alacrity.

"Linnet, dear," began the Earl's wife, nervously, deeming it best to come to the point at once. "I am going away from the Fens. I am going to leave you now, this very morning!"

Linnet looked incredulous, but sobered under the grave, sad look of Natalie, and scanned the dress of the latter, observing that Natalie now wore the same blue robe as on the occasion of their first meeting.

"Do you really mean to leave Linnet, Natalie?" she asked, plaintively.

The Earl's wife replied only by a bow of assent.

It would be a painful task to describe the grief of the daft maiden when she fully comprehended that her friend intended to desert her.

She wept and moaned, clinging to Natalie as though she would detain her by force, until the old housekeeper's attention was excited, and she drew near to witness the scene.

"Why not take her with you, Natalie?" suggested Hugh, as he walked towards the window.

"I do not believe her grandmother would allow her to go," was the reply, in a perplexed tone.

Hugh turned about, coming back to the

table, and demanded of Linnet if she would like to accompany her friend.

The girl's brow cleared immediately, her face became transfigured with joy, and she eagerly exclaimed,—

"Yes, I will go with Nata-lee; the birds and the flowers go away when the frosts and snows come, and the frost seems to be here when I think of Nata-lee's going," and she laid her hands over her heart. "Nata-lee will take me where other flowers and birds come, and she will never go away and leave poor Linnet all alone for always."

Old Elspeth had been watching her granddaughter curiously, and now demanded the cause of her excitement.

Hugh possessed a stentorian voice, and he informed the daft old woman that her mistress would leave the Fens immediately, and that she desired to take Linnet with her.

"As her maid?" questioned old Elspeth.

Hugh nodded.

A look of gratification appeared on the housekeeper's face, and she said,—

"I'm willing she should go, my lady. She's no help to me—bein' out on the moor all the time—and if you can make her useful, I'm glad on't. It'll be a comfort to me to know that she is provided for, and that I won't have her to look after. 'Taint likely she'll earn the salt to her porridge, but your ladyship knows what she is and won't be blaming me!"

So the matter was settled, to the infinite joy of Linnet.

Hugh brought down Natalie's trunk, while the deserted wife put on her bonnet and tied on her veil.

Adieus were then said to old Elspeth, who followed her mistress to the porch, and Natalie was assisted to her place.

She had had sorely seated herself when Linnet came up, radiant with a fresh wreath of flowers on her head, and with a quaint white cap crossed over her breast—an article that had been borrowed from her grandmother.

She embraced the old housekeeper in a passive sort of way, and then climbed into the vehicle, ignoring Hugh's proffered assistance, and nestling close to Natalie's side as though that place were her rightful home.

Hugh then took his seat, the horses started, and they passed out of the garden and upon the moor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Were it not worse than vain to close our eyes
Unto the azure sky and golden light,
Because the tempest cloud doth sometimes rise,
And glorious day must darken into night?

—Anon.

For some time each member of the party maintained silence, but Hugh at last remarked,—

"You look troubled, Natalie. Do you regret bringing Linnet?"

Natalie cast a quick glance at the girl, but she was absorbed in watching her favourite birds, and gave no heed to her friends.

"No, Hugh," answered the deserted wife, "I do not regret bringing her, for I could not really do otherwise. I think she would have died if I had left her. Still, I cannot rejoice at having linked her thoughtless life to my unhappy one. And that is not all. The friends who have sheltered me may not wish to shelter her!"

"You trouble yourself needlessly, Natalie. No friend of yours would look unkindly upon a being so devoted to you as poor Linnet!" Natalie was comforted, and dismissed all fears on the subject.

Hugh Fauld showed himself a wise friend, for he did not permit her to think much upon her sorrows.

He spoke to her of Affon Grange and its inmates, whom he had seen but once since they had cast her off; of Pauld Farm and the improvements he intended making there, and of similar subjects.

He did not confine himself to these, however, but spoke intelligently, showing that he had thought much of current affairs, of books, and of the great problems of existence—such as occupy the minds of the intelligent and thoughtful everywhere.

Natalie understood his ideas perfectly, and answered him with equal intelligence and evidence of thoughtfulness, but she loved rather to talk of the new model beehives at Pauld Farm, of the summer-houses and grape-covered arbours Hugh intended to erect, and of the bay-window he designed for his handsome drawing-room.

Yet while she led him to talk of these things, she wearily assured herself that they were, and could be, nothing to her; that she should never cultivate flowers for those bees to revel in; that she would never sit beneath those arbours, and that the bay-window would never be occupied by her.

In contrast with the comfort and luxury of Hugh's home, her own life seemed to stretch out bare and desolate before her, and she turned from the thought of it as the invalid turns from a nauseous draught.

The distance from the Fens to Carefort was at length accomplished, and the waggon drove up the busy high street of the town to the Crown Inn.

The railway station was near at hand, the travellers alighted at the inn, delivered up their conveyances, and walked on, arriving in time to book themselves for the coming train.

They had not long to wait, for after a few turns upon the platform, Hugh deserted the train as it wound round a curve, and he summoned Natalie and Linnet from the waiting-room.

Linnet had been persuaded to lay aside her wreath and to accept instead a small sun-hat that had been sent to Natalie by her husband, and which the deserted wife had caught up at the last moment from her trunk for the very use to which it was now devoted.

With this improvement in her toilet, there was little in Linnet's appearance to mark her mental condition.

The train arrived at the station, Natalie and Linnet were ushered into a first-class carriage, followed by Hugh, and the next moment they were leaving Carefort in the distance, and proceeding rapidly towards Wycherly Castle.

Linnet was at first greatly alarmed at the speed with which she was conveyed, but she soon became calm and even gleeful, looking out of the window and muttering that she had learned to fly faster than the birds.

It was noon when they reached their destination.

Natalie carefully veiled herself and looked nervously about as she descended from the train, half fearing that Lord Templecombe might be watching there for her, but nothing was seen of him or his valet.

"You need not fear being seen, Natalie," whispered Hugh, comprehending her fears. "Your husband thinks you are drowned, and has no thought of your reappearance. You remember that he did not know of my presence in the neighbourhood, and that, in his view, there was no one to save you."

The deserted wife felt reassured, and Hugh turned his attention to Linnet, bringing her to Natalie's side.

"Where shall I take you now?" asked Pauld, as the trio detached themselves from the group of embarking and disembarking passengers.

"You must leave us here, Hugh," answered Natalie. "I can find my way without assistance, and the good woman with whom I shall stay had better not see you."

"I submit to your wishes, Natalie. I will go to the Castle Inn."

Natalie shook her head.

"I cannot permit it, Hugh," she said resolutely. "It is not proper that you should remain in this neighbourhood upon my account, for I am a married woman, not a friendless girl. I cannot claim—I cannot accept—your farther protection. Do not think I am un-

grateful to you for your devotion to me, or for saving my life. I shall never forget it—never! But my life will not again be endangered, and I shall have no farther need of your assistance. I know it sounds selfish—but I beg you to go, Hugh."

"And leave you wholly in that man's power?"

"He is my husband," replied the deserted wife, and there was a tone in her sad voice that expressed regret that he was so. "If I should get into farther danger at his hand, I have friends upon whom I can call for assistance. You will will go back to the farm?"

"Since you desire it, and have other friends to protect you," answered Hugh Fauld, gravely. "But if you should need a stout arm to defend you or a friend to counsel you, you will not hesitate to summon me?"

Natalie returned a satisfactory response.

"Heaven be with you, Natalie," he said, extending his hand.

She clasped it in silence, thinking, as she looked upon its broad proportions, how that hand would have protected and enfolded her had she been free to accept it.

"My best friend," she murmured, tremulously her eyes obscured by tears, "you have stood by me in sorrow and disgrace, rescued me from early death, and benefited me by your wise counsels and sympathy. It costs me much to say it—but farewell for ever!"

She looked up into his face as she spoke those decisive words, and marked his sudden pallor, her own face scarcely less pale.

The conviction that she was doing right was all that sustained her in that painful moment.

Hugh Fauld gazed steadily at her for one moment and then said, in a husky voice,—

"You are right, Natalie. I will go back to Fauld Farm to forget you, if I can, in labour, and you—Heaven bless you! Farewell for ever!"

A firmer pressure of her hand, a last look into her blue eyes, and then he turned and went into the station to await the coming of the next train that would convey him towards home.

And Natalie drew closer her veil that had been pushed aside, gave one hand to the wondering Linnet, and set out by the nearest and loneliest route to the hidden cottage.

The walk was long, but she gave no heed to her weariness, thinking only that she had seen Hugh Fauld for the last time on earth, and that the tears she could not help shedding were a wrong to her unworthy husband.

Linnet skipped along like a gleeful child, carolling to the birds, whom she was surprised to see strongly resembled those upon her native moor, and plucking wayside flowers with which she had had no previous acquaintance.

In this manner they proceeded until they reached the green and secluded lane leading to Farmer Perkins' home.

They turned in at the wide gate at which Natalie had encountered Hugh Fauld, and walked on towards the cottage, the young wife beginning to be tortured by doubts as to her reception by its inmates.

In due course they reached the special grove in the midst of which the pretty cottage was concealed, and Natalie observed that some shadow seemed to have fallen upon the place.

The Perkins' children, looking neglected, played silently in the plantation, casting frequent apprehensive glances towards the vine-wreathed porch, wherein sat their mother in an attitude expressive of the deepest despondency.

Wondering greatly at the change that had come over the lately happy household, Natalie advanced towards the porch, followed by the silent Linnet, who clung closely to her friend.

The children were the first to notice the intruders, but they did not arise from their play, merely pausing to regard them.

It thus happened that the new-comers gained the porch without having been observed by Mary Perkins, and that the first intimation

she received of their presence was when Natalie said,—

"What is the matter, Mary? Has harm come to John?"

Mary sprang from her seat, staring at the speaker in astonishment, and exclaiming,—

"Heaven be praised, miss—you've come back again. My lady has been very anxious about you—at least, she was until Master Arthur disappeared. The Lady Leopoldes grieved, too; but I suppose you'll go to the Castle this evening?"

"Yes, I shall go at the earliest possible moment. But what is this about a disappearance?"

In reply to this inquiry, Mary said that her foster-child, the noblest and most beautiful boy in the whole world, had been stolen by tramps, as was supposed, and that her heart was almost broken in consequence.

"I would rather they had taken my Johnny instead," she wept, her glances resting upon her favourite son at that moment. "Master Arthur was more than a son to us, and we owe all we have to him. Oh, he was so generous, so polite, so clever—"

The remembrance of his perfections overcame her, and she sobbed aloud.

Natalie seated herself beside the good woman and Linnet sat down on one of the steps, regarding the strange scene with great delight.

The farmer's wife soon aroused herself to the demands of hospitality, learning, by inquiry, that her guests had eaten nothing since an early breakfast, and hastened into the house to prepare a repast for them.

The Earl's wife followed her and asked,—

"Is my friend welcome, too, Mary? Have you room for her?"

"Oh, dear yes, miss. Any friend of yours is welcome here, for you are a friend of my lady, and John and I can't do too much for my lady or any friend of hers. I only wish we could show her how grateful we are. We would lay down our lives to secure her happiness. And to think that our children should be spared while Master Arthur is carried off no one knows where, and no one knows who by! John, my husband, you know, went off yesterday in search of the pretty little lad, and he hasn't got back yet."

"No news is good news!" suggested Natalie.

"No. If Master Arthur had been found, John would have been home before this, for he knows how anxious I am. I am afraid he is lost, and won't ever be found."

Natalie did her best to cheer the bereaved foster-mother, and partially succeeded.

The luncheon was prepared and eaten, Linnet and the children being summoned to share it. After the meal Natalie and Mary Perkins returned to the porch, and Linnet followed the children to their play-ground, little Ally Perkins having greatly interested her.

The afternoon wore slowly away, and the shadows of evening began to fall softly over the scene.

Lights gleamed from the pleasant sitting-room of the cottage, and dinner steamed upon the table, and Mary Perkins' voice had summoned her guests and her children, when the crashing of boughs was heard, and the master of the dwelling rode wearily into the small open space surrounding his home.

Before he had had time to alight from his horse Mary rushed to him, exclaiming,—

"Is he found, John? Tell me he is found!"

The farmer slowly shook his head, gently removed his wife's hand from his arm, and sprang to the ground.

Mary turned and silently entered the cottage.

John took his horse out to the little stable, attended to him, and then came in, finding his guests seated at the table with his little family.

He greeted Natalie heartily, making her feel quite at home, bestowed a pitying glance upon the daft maiden, whose mental vacuity was

betrayed by her flowery crown and abstracted, vacant look, and took his usual seat.

His wife listened for a description of his search for Arthur, but in vain, the farmer's first words being,—

"I am hungry. I ain't eaten a monthful to-day. I only stopped long enough to feed the poor beast, and he was ready to drop when we got home. Mr Richard is about used up, I'm thinking. He feels the blow awfully."

"But what about the tramps, John?" cried Mary, impatiently. "Did you find 'em?"

"Yes, we found 'em."

"You did! Heaven be praised. What had they done with the little lad?"

"They hadn't seen him. They spoke true enough, there's no doubt about it. Mr. Richard believed 'em, and so we all did. Master Arthur didn't get to the ruins, and Mr Richard is thinking now that the lad may have got drowned or something."

Poor Mary stifled a shriek, and inquired,—

"Does my lady know it?"

"Not yet. Mr. Richard will tell her this evening!"

Silence fell upon the group. Mary had not the heart to ask any more questions, but wept silently, and her husband, equally grief-stricken, but not forgetful of his physical need, ate his dinner without looking up.

After dinner, Natalie conducted Linnet to her room, a neat one adjoining the larger apartment assigned to the Earl's wife, and then returned alone to the sitting-room. She informed the ex-schoolmaster that her trunk was at the station, received his promise to go for it in the morning, and then set out for Wycherly Castle.

CHAPTER XL.

Let her rave.

And prophesy ten thousand thousand horrors;
I could join with her now, and bid 'em come;
They fit the present humour of my soul.
The stings of love and rage are fixed within,
And drive me on to madness. Earthquakes,
whirlwinds,

A general wreck of nature now would please me.

Rowe's Royal Convert.

At the moment when Natalie set out for her long walk to Wycherly Castle, Alethea was seated in her inner chamber in the eastern tower. The lamp that depended from the ceiling was lighted, and gave out with its soft and mellow light a delicious fragrance. The curtains were drawn closely over the mullioned windows, and everything that had in it an element of disagreeableness seemed entirely excluded.

Everything but sorrow.

The bereaved young mother, whose grief was all the more bitter because it must be borne in secret and in silence, half reclined in a luxurious faultless gazing, with tearless eyes, into vacancy.

She had not slept the previous night, nor during the day, and had left her food untouched, yet with the pride that characterised her she had forced herself to appear in careful toilet at the dinner-table, and to enact her part as hostess with her usual graceful dignity.

But at the earliest possible moment she had returned to her own apartments.

She had paced the floor throughout the day until her wearied limbs had refused longer to support her weight, and had looked from her windows for the coming of Richard Layne until a film had gathered over her eyes, completely obscuring her vision.

And now, exhausted and despairing, she awaited the end.

She was quite alone, the presence even of her faithful Alison being distasteful to her, for Alison could weep and she could not—her terrible grief appearing to have dried the very fountain of her tears.

As she sat thus motionless, like a marble statue, the door of the private staircase leading down to the morning-room was swung

noiselessly open, and the waiting woman entered the presence of her mistress.

Alethea did not turn her head or look up until Alison had paused at her side, but she then gazed at her inquiringly.

The woman's countenance was almost impenetrable, for she had schooled her features in order to avoid giving pain to Miss Wycherly, and she said, quietly,—

"If you please, my lady, Mr. Richard is come. I've been wandering down by the lodge to watch for him, and I brought him to the morning-room—"

Alethea sprang to her feet.

The statue had become a living, excited woman, with flashing eyes and hurried breathing.

"Richard has come!" she cried. "Is—is my boy with him?"

"No, my lady," was the reluctant response.

"Is he found?"

"I don't know, my lady."

Feeling a sudden revivification of hope in her breast, and without reflecting that Alison would have questioned Layne eagerly in regard to her lost nurse-child, Alethea with renewed strength, hastened down the stairs to the morning-room.

Richard Layne arose and advanced from a distant corner to greet her.

Before summoning her mistress, the old nurse had lighted a large lamp, and by its light Miss Wycherly read the countenance of her friend—her tongue refusing to utter a question.

"My poor Alethea!" said Richard, as her investigation concluded, she silently sought the support of a friendly chair. "You have guessed the truth, I see!"

To his surprise, Miss Wycherly neither wept nor wept. She only said, weakly,—

"Tell me all about your search for him, Richard. Did you find those travelling jugglers?"

"Yes, but they had seen nothing of the child. I am convinced they had not, for I questioned each of them separately, and offered an immense reward for any information that would lead to his recovery."

"And you learned nothing?"

"Nothing, whatever. Arthur has disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up."

Alethea shuddered faintly, but gave no other sign of emotion.

"I thought I had gained a clue to him this morning," continued Richard, marvelling at her calmness, "but it turned out otherwise. I heard of a boy who was wandering about the country a dozen miles from here, and I started after him in hot haste, only to find that he was not our Arthur, but a little runaway, who has been already restored to his parents."

"You have not given up the search?"

"No, I have not given it up, but I have stopped it long enough to admit of a consultation with you. What shall I do now, Alethea?"

"What can you do, Richard? You must have arrived at some conclusion in regard to my boy. I see you have. Tell me what it is?"

Deceived by her calmness, and unable to bear in silence his oppressing fears, Richard incautiously answered,—

"To be frank with you, dear Alethea, I fear the worst. Arthur is old enough to know the way home if he had strayed away, or at least to inquire it. He would have called himself Arthur Layne and my nephew. He had money in his purse to pay his expenses. The truth is, in my opinion, Alethea, Arthur was so grieved by your failing to notice him the other morning that he ran away, or else some accident has happened to deprive him of life. If he went voluntarily, he may or may not return. If otherwise, we have looked our last upon him."

A low cry broke from Miss Wycherly's lips, but she was instantly silent again.

"How well you bear it, Alethea," said Richard, wiping his eyes. "I was afraid you would make yourself ill."

Miss Wycherly looked at him with a faint expression of surprise, as if wondering why she should weep when her heart seemed dead within her.

Layne little knew the depth of her awful anguish, or that tears were impossible to her overwrought brain and overstrung nerves.

"I shan't give him up, though," he said, sadly. "I will bring home his dead body or find him living. Hope for the best, Alethea."

I will start out again this very evening, as soon as I shall have had dinner. My servants are dragging that mill pond below the village, and you shall know the result early in the morning. You had better retire early—you look tired out—and get a good sleep, so that you will be better able to meet the events of to-morrow."

He took her hand, gazed affectionately into her face, the expression of which startled him, and kissed her forehead with brotherly fondness.

He had gained a sudden perception that any words of comfort he might offer would fall upon unheeding ears, and that a greater comfort than he was needed to soothe her wounded spirit.

"Poor girl!" he murmured, almost unconsciously. "Your life has been dark enough at the best. Why should your only ray of sunshine have been withdrawn?"

Miss Wycherly gave no sign of having heard these words.

Richard lingered a few minutes longer, talking of his plans and fears, and then he took his departure, feeling that his presence could do no good, and that she was impatient for him to resume his search.

As the door closed behind him, Alethea staggered upstairs to her inner chamber, and resumed her position in her *fauteuil*.

Alison stood near, awaiting her coming, and noticed as she entered, how feeble and uncertain were her movements, and how great was the pallor that had overspread her beautiful face.

"Oh, my lady," she cried, coming forward, "you look like death! I never saw you look like this since that awful night ten years ago. If you could only cry, my lady—"

She paused dismayed, for Alethea was regarding her with a strangely pitying glance.

"You look as though I was the only one that suffered!" exclaimed Alison, in a frightened voice. "Have you forgotten your own grief, my lady?"

Her mistress regarded her absently for a moment, and then passed her hand abstractedly over her forehead once or twice, as if endeavouring to remember.

Thoroughly alarmed, the waiting-woman knelt beside her mistress, taking one cold, white hand in her own, and chafed it, and wept over it, entreating her to give way to tears.

But the unnaturally bright eyes that met her own were undimmed with moisture, and had an absent look in them as though the mistress did not understand Alison's grief.

"This is terrible!" ejaculated Alison.

"Shall I send for the doctor, my lady?"

Alethea shook her head, and replied, irrelevantly,—

"Richard says he thinks my boy is dead. How could he think such a thing of Arthur, my bright-eyed boy? Why, it was only the other day he was with me and shouted and laughed so gleefully that I was half afraid someone would hear it! He wanted me to play and sing to him that last day, you remember, and I choked back my tears and sang. I'm glad of it now, for Richard thinks my boy is dead!"

"On, my lady, my lady!" sobbed Alison, in wild alarm.

(To be continued.)

LETTY'S LOVE STORY.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT.

WHEN Lettice opened her eyes the next morning the sun was pouring a golden flood of radiance into her room, and for a few seconds she gazed around her in bewilderment, unable to remember how she came amongst such unfamiliar surroundings.

Then recollection flashed across her, and, springing out of bed, she pulled up the blind, so as to get a better idea of the situation of the house than the darkness had rendered possible the previous evening.

Trees—trees—trees. She seemed in the midst of a perfect forest, for the garden was shut in on all sides by tall chestnuts and beeches, whose green boughs swayed softly to and fro above the high brick walls, with their spiked tops. These walls were themselves very pretty, the red brick of which they were built being mellowed by time into a wonderfully rich deep colour, while the many cracks and crevices were filled up with dainty ferns and the clinging blossoms of the shining-leaved toad flax.

All was very silent; even the hum of the great city that had accompanied Lettice so far on her way the night before was now lost in the distance, and there were no sounds to tell of other habitations near at hand.

The young girl retired from the window and proceeded to make her toilet, glad that she had provided herself with even the few articles she had been able to sweep into her bag before leaving The Mount yesterday morning.

Yesterday morning! Had only twenty-four hours really elapsed since she and Lady Alicia were sitting together on the sunny lawn, watching the peacocks strutting along in their jewelled plumage on the terrace above? Why, it seemed weeks ago!

When she had refreshed herself with a good wash, had brushed out and coiled up again the long waves of her beautiful hair, and exchanged her travel-stained collar and cuffs for clean ones, she went into the sitting-room, where someone was knocking impatiently at the door.

It proved to be Mrs. Barker, who had brought breakfast up on a tray, which she proceeded to sullenly deposit on the centre table.

"Is there anything else you want?" she asked, unwillingly, standing with her hands on her hips, and gazing at the young girl from beneath her scowling brows with an expression the very reverse of friendly.

"Nothing, thank you," Lettice courteously responded; "unless you will kindly tell me—"

The woman interrupted her unceremoniously.

"I will tell you nothing at all—it is not my business to. I shall see that you get your meals regular, and there I shall stop. So you may spare your questions once and for all."

Saying which she retired, having made it clear to Lettice that it was useless to expect help from that quarter.

"She has a private spite against me for some reason or other," our heroine said to herself; and then she sat down to her breakfast—which consisted of coffee, new-laid eggs, and broiled ham. Evidently there was no intention to stint her so far as material comforts were concerned.

At about eleven o'clock Mr. Barker himself made his appearance, bringing with him a load of books and magazines, and intimating to the girl that she was free to go out in the grounds until one o'clock.

Needless to say she at once availed herself of the permission, determining to make an effort to escape if the slightest possibility of doing so presented itself.

Of this chance, but they wall the more the presence to keep whole. Once conversed "Pre with ea so much and rui truth is good m some s don't b

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Of this, however, there was apparently no chance. The grounds were pretty extensive, but they were shut in all round by the high wall that has been already mentioned; and more than this, Lettice was uncomfortably aware that Mr. Barker, without thrusting his presence obtrusively upon her, yet contrived to keep her pretty well in view during the whole of the morning.

Once he approached her, and entered into conversation.

"Pretty grounds, aren't they?" he said, with easy familiarity. "Pity they have been so much neglected—everything runs to rack and ruin directly if it isn't looked after. The truth is the place has been uninhabited for a good many years, in consequence, I believe, of some silly story of its being haunted. You don't believe in ghosts, I hope?"

"No."

"Of course not. It's only idiots who are superstitious; but it's wonderful how many idiots there are in the world!"

Mr. Barker shook his head sadly, as if the contemplation of this credulity on the part of his fellow creatures pained him. After a minute, he added,—

"I think the story of the ghost began in the fact of a mad woman having lived here. It is said her husband's cruelty drove her insane; and then he would not let her be put into a lunatic asylum, but had this wall built so that she could not escape. For thirty years she lived here, and then one night, in a paroxysm of madness, she broke away from her keeper, and strangled her husband as he lay asleep in his bed. Served him right, didn't it?"

Lettice shuddered without replying. It was a gruesome story, and she half wished she had not heard it.

"There," continued Mr. Barker, pointing up to a window barred across with iron bars, even thicker than those in the rooms that had been given to Lettice herself, "that was her sitting-room, and it was there she died, raving out her fierce joy that she had revenged herself on her husband. Rather a horrible ending, wasn't it?"

He sauntered off without waiting to listen to her reply, and Lettice seated herself on a rustic chair, which was in the last stage of decrepitude, and threatened every moment to collapse under her weight.

Very slowly that first day passed, and when night came, and she retired to bed, she was too restless and ill at ease to sleep, and she no longer felt the physical fatigue which had wooed slumber so successfully the night before.

There was a large oak-wood grandfather's clock in the hall below, and it struck the hours with a sharp metallic clang that carried the sound all over the house.

Lettice heard twelve strokes shrilled forth, and then, after a long interval as it seemed, a single one vibrated on the night air.

Before the echo of it had died away a terrible scream rang out—loud, shrill, and piercing—a scream so full of despair that it might have been uttered by a lost soul in the extremity of torment.

Lettice sprang up in bed, cold drops of fear starting to her brow. She was not a nervous girl, but there was something so blood-curdling in the sound that she may be excused the momentary terror that overwhelmed her.

With bated breath she listened to hear if the shriek were repeated; but no! the midnight silence was undisturbed, and though she strained her ears, not the faintest murmur broke upon them.

She thought of the story Barker had told her in the morning of the wretched woman whom cruelty had robbed of her reason, brooding over her wrongs, until her poor clouded brain suggested a terrible vengeance. Was it possible that her spirit could indeed return to the scene of her earthly pilgrimage?

No, Lettice said to herself, very decidedly. Heaven was too merciful to permit such a

thing. The scream proceeded from a human being, like herself, a woman. But what woman was there in the house except Mrs. Barker?

She passed the rest of the night in a state of sleepless apprehension. It was no use disguising the fact from herself—she was thoroughly frightened and unnerved; and as soon as the first streaks of daylight gilded the east, she got up and dressed herself, waiting with what patience she might until Mrs. Barker appeared with her breakfast.

It struck her the woman looked worried and ill at ease. Certainly she was paler than she had been the previous day, and her eyes were heavy as if with want of sleep. She put the tray down, and was on the point of departure, when Lettice said,—

"Wait a minute, I want to ask you something about what happened last night."

The woman looked up quickly, her sullen eyes lighting into a spark of interest, perhaps of fear.

"What is it?" she demanded, harshly, and the girl then narrated how she had been disturbed.

"Fancy—nothing else," said Mrs. Barker, turning away; "or perhaps it was an owl. There are lots about here, and they do make a most skanking noise sometimes."

"It was not an owl," returned Lettice, decidedly, thinking of the one she had heard the evening before her departure from the Mount.

That sound had certainly been uncanny; but it could not compare with the one of last night, there had been nothing resembling human despair in it.

"It was not an owl," she repeated, with conviction.

Her listener merely shrugged her shoulders. "Then I'm sure I don't know what it could have been."

"But surely you must have heard it?"

"No, I didn't. I'm a heavy sleeper, and don't lie awake o' nights fancying all sorts of things like some people do."

Clearly she either knew nothing, or would not tell it. Lettice inclined to the latter idea, for there had been a certain uneasiness in the woman's shifty glances that was suggestive. She determined to renew her inquiries to the son when she saw him in the garden.

But Barker kept out of the way, and would not permit himself to be questioned, and Lettice spent a far more miserable day than the previous one had been. The terror and mystery of her abduction weighed more heavily upon her, and the hopes of speedy freedom grew fainter.

Surely Herbert would trace her whereabouts as soon as he returned! But he had not expected to come back from Monte Carlo under a week, and as yet only three days had elapsed since his departure.

So far she had showed a bold front to her misfortune; and in point of fact, she had put faith in Barker's assurances that no harm was intended her.

But the mystery seemed to grow more unfathomable, and now it was tinged with dread, and a dark horror that she could hardly put into words.

Barker had not quite carried out his promise of giving her the freedom of the house and grounds either. She was allowed three hours in the garden, but after that her door was bolted outside, and she was virtually a prisoner in her own room.

How long the days seemed, and how monotonous!

Lettice grew to look forward even to the visits of the dark-browed woman who brought her meals, though it was evident that lady's amiable intention to make herself as disagreeable as she possibly could!

Thus three days passed away, and on the fourth evening Mrs. Barker came in later than usual, carrying a glass of wine and some biscuits.

"My son sees you didn't eat enough supper, and you are to drink this else you'll be fallin'

ill," she observed, acrimoniously. "There ain't no doctor about here, so I'd advise you to try your best and keep your 'ealth for your own sake. Drink the wine up, so as I may take the glass down and wash it with the rest of the supper things."

"I don't feel inclined to drink it just at present," returned the girl, coolly. "It is possible I may do so later on if you leave it."

But as soon as she was alone she took up the glass and smelt its contents, then put her lips to the wine and just tasted it. Yes, it was slightly bitter—certainly more bitter than port had any right to be, and Lettice's suspicions that it was slightly drugged were confirmed.

Very quietly, but with ashen lips, she emptied it away; then, as usual after night-fall, locked her door, and prepared to spend the night lying, dressed as she was, on the couch.

Was some dire harm really intended her? Was the wine poisoned?

Her heart stood still, and a sick fear took possession of her. Utterly helpless, defenceless, how could she cope with these unknown enemies?

Her only protection against them was the lock of the door—a slender one, indeed, seeing that Barker himself would have no difficulty in breaking it open by the mere exercise of his strength.

A little past midnight she fancied she heard muffled footsteps in the corridor outside.

They paused at her door, and the handle was gently turned. Presently the footsteps retreated rather less guardedly than they had approached.

The girl sat upright on the couch, her breath coming and going in quick pants, her senses strained to their utmost tension. What would the next scene in the drama be? she wondered—for some subtle instinct warned her that a crisis was impending.

Half-an-hour elapsed—it seemed to her spun out into fifty times its ordinary length—and during that time the mantle of silence that enwrapped the house was undisturbed.

Then came the low murmur of voices, and Lettice sprang up and cautiously approached the door so as to place her ear against the keyhole.

Footsteps were coming along the corridor once more—very slowly and cautiously—but they passed by her door and continued their way down the staircase.

Lettice breathed more freely, but still retained her station until she heard the rattle of the chain on the front door, which was apparently opened.

This door was immediately under her bedroom window, and from the latter a perfect view of the porch could be obtained. At any rate she would be able to see what was going on below—that is to say, if the darkness was not too dense to be penetrated.

She entered the bedroom, and carefully lifted up a corner of the blind. There was no moon, and the stars were partially obscured by floating trails of mist; nevertheless, the outline of trees and shrubs was perfectly visible, and every moment the clouds seemed to be clearing off the face of the sky.

A man crossed the broad gravelled path immediately opposite the front door and stared up at her windows. It was Barker, and Lettice had no difficulty in guessing his object. He wanted to make sure by the absence of light in her room that she was asleep.

Apparently satisfied on this score, he returned to the porch again, and there was another pause. Lettice still peering through the window, the sash of which chanced to be open. The damp night air came up to her, laden with the peculiarly earthy smell that clings to it after rain, and faintly scented with the fragrance of a patch of mugwort growing in the border—ever afterwards she connected that same odour with the horror of what followed.

In the gloom two figures advanced from

under the porch, walking slowly and carefully, and carrying on their shoulders some long narrow object covered with a black pall.

Lettie shrank back, with a low, suppressed cry of utter terror. Her trembling limbs gave way under her, and she fell forward, prone upon the ground, struck with the lightning flash of certainty, that she was in the presence of some awful crime.

For the object James Barker and his mother carried on their shoulders was in good truth a coffin, and Letty, calling to mind that heart-rending scream of two nights ago, was able now to put into shape the nameless fear that had haunted her ever since she had heard it.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

IN less than half-an-hour the Barkers returned to the house, but, of course, without their gruesome burden, and after they had let themselves in, and closed the door, silence once more reigned complete.

For some time Lettice remained at her post near the window, until her limbs grew stiff and cramped from the unnatural position. Then she slowly rose, and paced backwards and forwards, her brain in a tumult, her senses almost paralysed with the weight of the dread secret of which she had become an unwilling participator.

Never had the approach of morning been so welcome—though, indeed, the dawn broke greyly and cloudily enough; for a soft, slow rain was falling, and all the earth seemed bathed in a steaming mist.

At the usual time Mrs. Barker appeared, and Lettice wondered whether the sign of guilt would be stamped on her face. But, so far as she could see, the woman's demeanour did not differ in the least degree from its ordinary suavity, and she left the room without having made a single remark.

That day passed in exactly the same way as its predecessors, save for the fact that Lettice's anxiety almost reached fever-heat. She was revolving in her mind a hundred different plans of escape, but not one seemed practicable.

Then she meditated an appeal to Barker himself; but when it came to the point she hesitated to make it, for the bold admiration in the man's eyes grew every day more marked, and Letty's proud spirit recoiled from humiliating herself before it.

Thus a week elapsed, and now the young girl's hopes grew brighter, evidently no harm was intended to herself. Surely by this time Herbert was back, and would have heard of her disappearance, she knew he would move heaven and earth to find her, and all the aid that money could procure would be his.

It is true her abduction had been effected with so much cunning skill that it would probably be difficult to trace her; but Lettice's faith in her lover was great—it had been the one thing that had kept up her courage during this terrible time, and enabled her to show a bold front, even when her heart was weighted down with direst fears.

For the last few days the weather had been detestable; when it was not absolutely raining, a damp mist had filled the air, and, as a consequence, Letty had not taken her customary exercise in the grounds. She was growing dreadfully pale and thin, and she noticed that once or twice Mrs. Barker looked at her somewhat apprehensively.

"My son sees you had better go out this morning," she said, ungraciously enough, one day, when the weather showed signs of clearing. "I've brought you a pair of goloshes to put on, so as your feet mayn't get damp."

She threw them down as she spoke, and Letty hastened to avail herself of the permission accorded her.

The trees were yet dripping with moisture, though it had let off raining, and a few rifts

in the clouds rendered visible a patch or two of blue sky. But the gravel walks were still sodden, and little pools of wet lay in all the hollows.

Looking down, Lettice's eyes fell upon foot-prints well marked in the path, and she stopped a minute to examine them. For they were small—smaller indeed than her own, and the feet that made them had been elegantly shod. There was the impression of a smart little heel, and the toes were fashionably pointed. Whose could they be?

Not Mrs. Barker's certainly, for her feet were of the "beetle crusher" genus, and under any circumstances she would never have been guilty of a Parisian coquetry. Clearly there must be another visitor in the house.

Lettice looked curiously up at the windows of the long, low, rambling building, and shuddered as her gaze rested on the heavy bars guarding the one where the madwoman had been kept.

Barker was standing under the porch, smoking as usual, but his eyes did not leave her for long, and Lettice was well aware that no action of hers was lost upon him.

Just then his mother joined him, and said something in a low voice, upon which they both disappeared inside the house. Now was Letty's opportunity—if it were possible to climb over the wall at any point, she would do it!

This was the first time she had found herself actually alone in the grounds since her incarceration, and she at once plunged into the shrubbery that led to the door, which gave access to the lane. But before she had gone very far she was brought to a sudden pause by a sight that sent the blood in a swift rush to her heart, and for the moment almost deprived her of speech.

Midway in the shrubbery, and to the right, was a small clearing under the drooping boughs of a willow, and here, kneeling on the wet clay, and strewing flowers over a patch of newly-turned earth, was the figure of a woman, whose white face bore the impress of a misery too deep for words.

She had no covering on her head, and her light brown hair, twisted carelessly up, looked dishevelled and untidy. Her dress, too, hung loose on her fragile figure, and there was a general air of desolation about her that seemed to say she and her youth, with all its pretty vanities, had bidden each other an eternal farewell.

And yet she was very young, not yet two and twenty, and her blue eyes were still beautiful, for all the stinging tears that had showered from them. There was a dainty grace about her too, that even her misery could not entirely do away with.

"Marcia!"

The cry broke involuntarily from Letty's pallid lips, and the woman immediately sprang to her feet, her eyes wilder and wider than ever, her hands outstretched as if in the extremity of despair.

A minute later, and she was in Letty's arms, held tight to Letty's breast, while warm tears fell on her bowed head, and her sister's voice murmured eager words of tenderest love in her ear.

What did Letty care for the wrong Marcia had done her in keeping her ignorant of her whereabouts for so long? What did she care for the scorn of the world, and the abasement of the poor girl whom Fate had treated so cruelly? What, indeed, did she care for anything, save the one fact that her sister was restored to her, that her loving arms held in their clasp the one creature in all the world with whom she could claim kinship—the companion of her babyhood, the sharer of all her innocent, girlish joys and sorrows, her best beloved Marcia!

"But tell me," Lettice said, after a few moments of silence that was more eloquent than any words, "what brings you here?"

Marcia looked round hurriedly, as if in fear of eavesdroppers; then pointed with one

trembling finger to the flower-strewn patch at her feet.

"Do you see that?" she asked, in a tone of profound melancholy, all the sadder because of its despairing resignation. "That is where my little child lies buried."

"Your little child!" Letty repeated stupidly, as she stepped back a pace.

"She died four nights ago, and they buried her here. My poor little white blossom!"

Marcia took up one of the earth-stained flowers, and pressed it passionately to her lips, then she turned to her sister with a sudden fierceness.

"Do you think there can be any mercy, Lettice, in that Heaven that robs a mother of her child? Ah! you don't know what it is—the watching, and waiting, and longing, while your heart is torn with anguish, and you cry aloud to a Power that is deaf to all your prayers! When your blood is turned into gall, and all the joy and hope is crushed out of your soul by a relentless Destiny against which there is no appeal! No wonder women are driven to sin and madness; no wonder they seek refuge in the deep, dark river, that at least is no crueler than the world!"

She checked her wild words sharply, and pressed both hands across her chest, as if the heavy beatings of her heart were causing her fierce physical pain. At the same moment her quick ear caught the sound of the rustling of the shrubs, and she made a swift gesture of warning.

"Go!" she whispered. "Say nothing of our meeting. I will contrive to see you later on."

Lettice obeyed; all her desire for flight dying out under the influence of this new discovery. Like one in a dream she returned to the garden, and went straight into the house, to her own room.

At least one anxiety was taken from her. No crime had been committed on that terrible vigil when Marcia's scream of anguish for her dead little one had cleft the night stillness; and the coffin borne out of the porch, forty-eight hours later, had contained the poor baby body on its way to its final resting-place.

She had still to learn what strange fate had brought Marcia and herself to the same house, and with that explanation, perhaps, the mystery of her own abduction would be cleared away.

Poor Lettice! She little thought what the knowledge would mean to her!

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARCIA'S STORY.

IT was after midnight, when Lettice heard the outer bolt of the door slipped back, and a minute later, Marcia came in.

All day long she had been expecting her; but now that she was here, some strange terror of her presence fell upon Letty—shadowy, inexplicable, but none the less keen. Perhaps it was due in a measure to the set whiteness of her sister's face—so might Niobe have looked, when her children were reft from her—and no marble could have been more deadly cold. Lettice absolutely recoiled as her warm lips touched those other icy ones.

Marcia manifested no curiosity as to what had brought her sister here. A numb apathy seemed to hold her faculties in check, or her own woes drove all other interests from her mind.

She seated herself wearily by Letty's side on the couch, the candle she had brought with her, and set down in front of her, throwing strange shadows on her face, and showing up the hollows under her eyes.

How terribly she had aged even in this short space of time. It was difficult to reconcile this haggard world-weary woman with the radiant rose-lipped Marcia of two years ago!

For a few minutes she remained silent, her hands clasped on her lap; suddenly she said,—

"Where is mother?"

Lettice recoiled in shocked surprise.

"Did you not know she was—dead?" she asked, in a lowered voice.

"No, I did not know it, but I am glad of it. I envy her!"

"Marcia!"

"Why do you look at me like that?" demanded the elder girl. "Have I said anything so very repugnant to your feelings? I did not intend to. What I meant was that Death is Peace, and I rejoice that she has it. Poor mother! She never cared for me much; but she would have been humbled to the very dust if she could see me now, and I am thankful she has been spared the pain of it. Don't you understand?"

"Alas! alas! Lettice was beginning to understand at last!"

Up to now, she had kept her belief in her sister's innocence. Marcia was sinned against, but never sinning. For the first time horrible doubts of her own faith arose in the true loyal heart, and poor Lettice's head sunk lower on her breast.

Marcia watched her for a few minutes in silence, then took her hand and began to stroke the soft white fingers; more as it seemed from absence of mind than any special desire to show affection.

"It is a pity we have met, dear," she said at last, with a sigh. "You were growing to forget me, perhaps, and now my shame and my sin will come upon you as a fresh thing."

Lettice shook off her touch with angry indignation.

"Forget you! Oh, Marcia, how can you find it in your heart to say such a thing to me—me, who have always loved, always trusted you, always looked forward to the hour when you would be given back to me! If it had not been for mother, I should have started forth at once in search of you. I should have done so, indeed, when she died, only I had no money, and so I was forced to go out and work for some. But night and day you have been in my thoughts. My one great hope has been that Heaven would let us meet again and renew our love, just as it was in the olden days!"

Marcia shook her head sadly.

"The old days! Ah, Letty, they will never come back again—never, never! They are gone for ever like last year's snow, or the breath from my little child's body. There is a gulph between us Letty, and not even time can bridge it over."

She was beginning to speak more wildly again, and as she ceased she wrung her hands together in a silent paroxysm of distress infinitely sad to look upon.

The tears rose involuntarily to Letty's eyes, but they did not fall. She felt that at all hazards she must preserve her self control, since it behoved her to hear the truth, whatever it might be, from Marcia's own lips.

"Calm yourself, darling," she whispered, tenderly, taking the poor thin hands in hers, and holding them tight. "You must let me hear everything that has befallen you, and then we will take counsel together, and see what is best to be done for the future."

Marcia smiled bitterly.

"There is no future for me," she said, hopelessly. "As for telling you my miserable story, I will do so if you wish, though I don't see what good it will do. Better let me go away, and forget that I ever existed."

Lettice allowed this to pass without comment. She got up and looked the door so as to guard against all possibility of intrusion, then resumed her seat at Marcia's side again.

"Begin," she said, soothingly, and yet with a certain command in her voice. "Tell me all from the very commencement."

Marcia pillowed her chin in the hollow of her hand, and leaned forward a little, supporting her elbow on her knee. The flickering light of the candle cast strange shadows on her face, lending it a certain weird beauty—

the blue eyes were full of dreamy intensity. She looked like a woman existing far more in memories of the past than in the actual present.

"The commencement!" she repeated, drearly. "That seems to me such a long time ago that I ought hardly to remember it—and yet, it is stamped on my brain in letters of fire!"

Her manner suddenly changed. She turned and faced Lettice, and began to speak hurriedly and yet distinctly, a little colour drifting into her pale cheeks under the stress of her emotions.

"Do you remember the day the gentleman from London came to see mother? Well, that was the first time I met my lover—in the morning—in the Chine Woods."

Lettice started. Strange—that was the morning of her introduction to Hubert.

"I needn't tell you what he said to me," Marcia continued, "I suppose all love stories are the same up to a certain point. Our meeting was accidental in the first place; but before we parted I had promised to see him again the next day, and that was the reason I refused to go to Malvern with mother."

"Of course I had no business to make appointments with a stranger, and, perhaps, I deserve the punishment that has come upon me; but, Heaven knows, my intentions were innocent enough, and no idea of harm ever entered my head."

"Besides, my life was so destitute of everything in the shape of pleasure that I eagerly seized any break in the monotony that offered itself; and he was handsome and fascinating, one's very ideal of a lover."

"Well, I saw him every day, sometimes oftener; and in less than a fortnight after mother's departure he asked me to elope with him."

"We were to be married secretly, for reasons which he explained to me. A relation of his from whom he had expectations of a good deal of money, was very ill, supposed to be dying, and his marriage at that precise moment would imperil his chances of her fortune if it became known."

"I suggested that we should wait, but he overruled my objections, and finally, as you know, I left home with him."

She paused a moment, biting her lips hard. Lettice made no attempt to speak, and she continued,—

"He brought me to London, and took me to some place that I believed to be a registrar's office, where we were married. After that we went into lodgings in one of the suburbs, and for a few months I had a spell of happiness, such happiness as a butterfly may enjoy in its one short day of sunshine."

"Then my husband was often absent from home, and it struck me that his love had cooled. He was kind to me, he brought me books, and flowers, and music; but there was a change, and I grew frantically jealous, for I fancied I had a rival."

"During all this time he refused to allow me to communicate with you or my mother, saying that even yet it would be dangerous to his prospects to let our marriage be published. His will was my law, and I kept silence. And so twelve months passed by, and then my baby's birth drew near. My husband was away from me more than ever. He had been absent two months, and I had worked myself into a fever of anxiety and longing to see him. I determined to go to him at his home in the country, for I felt that if I remained alone in my dreary London lodgings any longer I should go mad!"

"Then you did know where he was?" asked Letty, gently, as she paused.

"Yes; at least, I partially knew. He used to write to me occasionally, and though he did not put the address of the house on his letters, the post-mark on the envelope was always the same—Stanford. So to Stanford I went, and directly I mentioned his name at the station, I was told where he lived, and accordingly I walked to the Grange—"

Lettice interrupted her with a faint cry. An icy hand seemed gripping at her throat, and a terror too great for words, was rising before her like a thin, impalpable, and yet most horrible phantom.

"The Grange, did you say?"

"Yes, Ellesmere Grange. What is the matter? Are you ill?"

Lettice shook her head.

"Go on," she said, hoarsely.

"When I got to the Grange, I found there only the housekeeper, Mrs. Barker, the woman who is with me now," continued Marcia, after one uneasy glance at her sister. "I don't know that she is a very sympathetic creature as a rule; but my condition was so pitiable that she took me in, and did what she could to restore me. The walk from the station had been longer than I anticipated, and I was thoroughly knocked up by it."

"What happened afterwards I can't tell you, for I was very ill; and when I recovered consciousness enough to know what was going on about me, I found my little babe at my side. My husband was with me too, and Mrs. Barker. I suppose I must have been in bed some time, and when I got up, I was too weak to walk."

"But I was not unhappy, for the housekeeper was good to me, and I saw my husband occasionally; besides, I had my child. She was never christened, poor mite; but I called her Letty after you. As soon as I was quite convalescent, and wanted to go out into the air, I was met by a refusal on the part of my husband."

"He insisted on my not leaving the house, for fear of being seen, as he said it was most important that my presence should be kept secret from the neighbourhood."

"I obeyed, but one moonlight night I implored Mrs. Barker to let me go out into the grounds, promising to wrap myself up so well that no one could see my face, and she consented."

"The sense of freedom was so delightful that I walked on and on until I came within sight of a house that I afterwards learned was called the Mount; and then, to my utter amazement, I saw you at one of the windows. I could hardly believe my eyes, until I spoke your name, and you answered, then I knew that it must indeed be your very self!"

"If you knew it was I why did you go away when I came down to you?" asked Lettice, reproachfully, calling to mind her own keen disappointment at Marcia's flight.

"Because I suddenly remembered what my husband had said, and although I would have given my right hand to be able to stay and speak to you, I dared not disobey him. I went into the plantation and hid myself in some shrubs, and there some time later he discovered me, and took me back to the Grange—for I had overestimated my strength, and could not have reached home without the help of his arm. He was very angry at my imprudence, and declared that I should not leave the house again until I left it for good. But once afterwards I saw you. It was one rainy afternoon when you and a gentleman took shelter in the Grange. Do you remember it?"

"Only too well," answered Lettice, with a shudder, as she recalled the events of that terrible afternoon. "But where did you see me?"

"In a little room at the end of the corridor. I had never seen it before, and when I peeped in and caught sight of you the sudden temptation was too much for me, and I resolved to let you know of my presence. You were looking in the mirror, and I saw your face as it is I peered over your shoulder—"

Lettice interrupted her with a little cry of astonishment.

"Then it was you who frightened me as I thought it was—"

"A ghost?" queried Marcia, with a faint, shadowy smile—the first that Lettice had seen on her lips since their meeting in the morning.



[MIDWAY IN THE SHRUBBERY, KNEELING ON THE WET CLAY, WAS THE FIGURE OF A WOMAN.]

"The mirror was very blurred and indistinct, and I daresay I looked white and weird enough for some supernatural being."

"But your throat—there was blood on it?" said the younger girl, still incredulous.

"No—it was a coral necklace. I wore it because I fancied baby liked the bright red. I saw I had frightened you, for you covered your face with your hands and fled from the room, and I dared not follow because of my companion. If it had not been for him I should have come down after you."

In spite of herself Lettice could not help smiling as she remembered her terror. No doubt her nerves had been unstrung by the revelation she had heard from Sir Wilfred, otherwise she would never have let her imagination play her such a trick.

But the smile was only momentary, and her face grew tense and anxious again as Marcia went on with her story—still speaking in the same level, hopeless tone that she had used all along.

"It was soon after this that my husband said I must leave the Grange. There were very important reasons why I should not remain there any longer, and one of these reasons was that he did not believe the place was healthy, and that both I and the babe would be better away. He had arranged with Mrs. Barker to accompany me to London, and then she would take me to a house in the country where I was to stay for the rest of the summer. Of course I agreed to this, as I did to the rest of his suggestions, and accordingly the housekeeper and I travelled up to London.

"He met us at the station, and came with us down here, and then the sword that had been hanging over my head fell, and I learned the truth. With his own lips, the man I had supposed my husband, told me that our marriage was no marriage, he had deceived me from the first, and the mock

ceremony that had taken place between us had no legal significance whatever. He had gone through it simply in order to quiet my scruples, and now the time had come when he deemed it necessary that I should know the real facts of the case."

"The villain!" cried Lettice, and she clenched her hands together until the nails cut deep into the flesh. "Oh, if I had only been there!"

Marcia looked at her with a sort of dull curiosity.

"What should you have done?"

"Killed him, I think!—only death would have been too good for him!"

Marcia smiled with a weary bitterness that told its own tale of apathetic despair. There was something infinitely more pathetic than tears in that slow, cold smile of hers.

"At first I felt as you do; but it seems to me I have got no feeling left now. I can speak of it calmly, and without caring very much. I shall never care for anything again. Well, the reason he told me this was because he was going to be married—really married this time—and consequently he wished to come to some definite arrangement with me. He should still continue to look after me, he said; and he pretended it was a great grief to him to part from me—it was Fate, not his will. At first I was stunned. I would not believe it was in man's nature to be so false, but his own words left me no room for doubt. I think I should have gone mad if, that same night, my baby had not been taken ill, and anxiety for her almost drove everything else out of my mind." Poor Marcia stopped, her lips quivering pitifully. Then, in an unnaturally calm voice, she proceeded. "Perhaps it was best she should go. If she had lived, the world would have scorned her because of the stain on her birth, and now her little white soul is with the angels. Yes; it is better so."

She sighed heavily as she finished, and for a little while there was silence. Outside the rain was pattering down on the leaves, and a spray of ivy that had got detached from its fastenings, tapped against the window with ghostly fingers.

At last Lettice spoke; putting the question that she had only, by a great effort, restrained herself from putting before.

"Marcia, you have not told me the name of—this man!"

Marcia raised her heavy eyes, and looked her sister fully in the face.

"No, for the very mention of it seems to scorch my lips. His name is Hubert Ellemore!"

(To be continued.)

THE scarcity of rain this year has revived among the superstitious Slavs some quaint heathenish beliefs and practices. An interesting ceremony is practised among the Bulgarian colonies in Bessarabia. It is called "Paparooda" which signifies "the thirsty demon." The maidens of the village choose a pretty orphan girl, strip her naked, and clothe her in a garment of leaves. She is then denominated "Paparooda," and becomes their leader. They follow her through the village, while she stops at every house door, and orders them to sing. She herself does not sing, but turns around in a circle, with the left arm raised and the right hand outstretched. The singing is continued in a sad, slow tone, until the master of the house comes and puts a handful of flour in Paparooda's hand. As soon as this is done she orders her followers to stop singing at once, and leads them to the next house. But the inmates of the house which the procession leaves must pour water upon the Paparooda and her followers; the more water they can pour out, the sooner will rain come.



[MORTIMER TURNED AND FLED LIKE A MADMAN FROM THE SCENE OF SLAUGHTER!]

NOVELLETTE.]

THE WIFE'S TRAGEDY.

CHAPTER I.

"JONE, I cannot do it. I have borne too much already!"

"But remember, dear, he is your husband, and the world is hard upon women who leave their lords, especially hard upon women of our profession. Then, too, he has neither struck you, nor actively ill-treated you. Hester, be patient!"

"Patient!" echoed Hester Garwood, passionately; "and have I not been almost criminally so! I have borne harsh words and unmerited reproaches in silence these six long years. Have I ever, until now, by word or look complained? Have not even you, Ione, occasionally scolded me for submitting to his caprices? Have I not striven to rise for his sake, and worked with and for him, with all my heart and soul. I grudge nothing I have done, nothing I have given; but I claim to be treated as a reasonable creature, a loyal wife. I ask only for consideration and kindness!"

"Do not so excite yourself, Hester," pleaded Ione Melvin, "you will be ill after it; and, dear sister, with all his faults and caprices, I am sure Mortimer loves you dearly."

Hester threw out her hands with a swift, impatient gesture.

"Loves me! then men have a queer way of testifying to their affection. There are times of late, when he is in his good mood, and you know how good he can be, when he hangs about me with a lover's attention, that I am tempted to cry out 'Hypocrite!' and thrust him away. I am not naturally an evil-tempered woman, but he is changing and warping all my nature. Ah, Ione! be warned by my experience, and do not forge the fetters nothing but death can break!"

"Hester," the younger girl said, in a tone of awe, "surely you have not ceased to love Mortimer?"

"No, I almost wish I had, but he will not let me respect him; and, oh! what is love without esteem?" and with white hands she clasped her whiter brow, whilst all her face was convulsed with anguish.

She leant against the wall, looking down at her sister with wide despairing eyes, and the tears rose to Ione's as she met their gaze. She put out her hand, and gently touched Hester's.

"My dear, I cannot bear to see you so unhappy. Since we were left alone you have been mother and sister alike to me. There is no one like you, no one; but just in this one thing you are not quite so generous as I have always found you. Perhaps you expect more of Mortimer than he can give."

Hester laughed a short, bitter laugh. What did Ione know of all she endured; of the bitter words which lingered in heart and brain alike long after they were spoken; of the days and days when Mortimer Garwood scarcely exchanged speech with his wife, when, to all her gentle ministrations he replied only by sullen silence or sharp monosyllables; when not an act of hers could win a smile or glance of approval; when the dainty dishes she always insisted upon herself preparing for him were sent away untouched, with some disparaging remark. Thinking of these things, the poor wife drew herself erect.

"You don't understand," she said, slowly; "it is the little things that fret. But what is it you wish me to do? If it is in my power, I promise you to do it."

"It is in your power, and I know if you make a vow you will keep it. For your own sake and for Mortimer's, will you try, dear Hester, in the course of the next four weeks, to effect a change in your relationship with your husband? Tell him plainly that unless you are treated more courteously and kindly

you cannot live with him longer; and then try—oh! my dear, for your own sake, try to be so gentle with him that even he can neither find nor fancy ground for complaint?"

Hester drew her breath sharply. It was hard that she, the faithful, earnest helpmate should be placed apparently in the wrong; but then Ione was only twenty, and knew nothing of men, for what can any woman understand of their nature until she is married, and the first delight of possession has grown dull? Then she smiled bitterly,—

"It shall be as you wish, dear; but after this no entreaties will move me to concession. Now it is time to dress for rehearsal. You will come with me, of course. Oh! how I wish you were not off to town to-morrow. I shall see nothing of you until the close of the season."

"But I shall write you regularly," said Ione, who did not quite realize yet how the written words seem colder than eye or hand; "and it is for my good I go. The chance is a grand one."

Hester made no answer. She was busy with her toilet, and perhaps her heart was too full for speech; yet, not for worlds would she permit her friends and acquaintances to guess the bitter truth, the secret grief consuming her. She was nothing if not proud.

They went out together, passing through the shop, Mortimer Garwood was a book-binder, and from thence into the steep streets of Bristol.

Ione Melvin looked bewitching in her pale blue gown, and broad-brimmed hat shading her pretty face.

She was what has been called a stained blonde; that is her complexion was dazzlingly fair, her eyes hazel in some lights, amber in others, and her hair of a deep, pure gold, just the shade coveted by artists, raved of by poets.

She was petite in figure, and light as a bird in her movements. Critics spoke more than

favourably of her talent, and just now she had secured a very good engagement in town. Her forte was comedy; just the reverse of Hester's, who was fast growing in popularity as a tragedienne.

Hester was twenty-six, tall and slender, with a very wealth of nut-brown hair, a face which, without being in the least pretty, was remarkably attractive, perhaps by reason of the mobile mouth, for that was decidedly beautiful, and the expressive grey eyes.

Years ago, when she was only eighteen, and Ione twelve, her parents had died. They were middle-class people, who had nothing to leave their children; but they had given Hester a splendid education, and had been wise enough to allow her to choose her own profession.

At eighteen she was playing small parts in provincial theatres, thereby earning the magnificent salary of a pound a week.

But the orphans had, fortunately, simple tastes, and contrived to make two ends meet without much pinching or scraping.

It is true, Hester worked very hard; rehearsing in the morning, teaching Ione throughout the afternoon, mending and making for both, and spending the evening at the theatre, whilst Ione waited for her behind the scenes.

And success crowned the young girl's efforts. She did not burst like a meteor upon the public; still little by little, step by step, she climbed the ladder to competency. But she was not content; she must have fame too, and slowly, but surely, fame was coming to her.

At twenty she married Mortimer Garwood, but she did not leave the stage. Her earnings were willingly sunk in his business, and with satisfaction she saw it increasing steadily.

She accepted few long engagements, because they would take her from husband and home; and would sacrifice much in the way of salary rather than quit the Bristol boards.

As time went on, and Mortimer was able to engage a foreman, he sometimes accompanied her to distant towns, remaining until her engagement expired.

But these were not Hester's happiest times, for Mortimer, whilst loving her dearly, was a little jealous of her superior talents and the popularity she won. Then he was essentially a home-loving man; still it was with his consent she continued her profession. Indeed, he was too wise to forbid that, knowing as he did, although he would not acknowledge so much, that Hester's earnings were the chief mainstay of his business.

At times he complained they were not large enough, or that she did not husband them as she should.

He was in such haste to grow rich. He forgot that it is rarely the plodding hard workers who make fortunes rapidly. And then, too, he was naturally of a melancholy temperament, one who makes "troubles of trifles;" and from these sources sprang all poor Hester's unhappiness.

Month after month, year after year, his dissatisfaction grew; and Hester bore with him patiently, lovingly; never meeting anger with anger, never reminding him of benefits bestowed, and welcoming every better mood of his with smiles and caresses.

But now the limits of her patience had been reached. She had spoken her first bitter words to him, and he had heard them in surprise and rage too deep to permit retort.

It was of these things Hester thought as she wended her way to the theatre, and it was over these she brooded as she retraced her steps. But Ione saw, with pleasure, that as they neared the house, the frown left her brow, and she forced her lips to smile.

Mortimer was alone in the shop, and he did not look up as they entered; but the wife, intent upon reconciliation, went to him, and with an arm placed affectionately about his neck, said,—

"We are early back to-day, dear. Come and have dinner; then, as a treat, we will go out upon the downs."

"I'm busy!" he answered, sullenly; "my time is not my own as yours is!"

Still she stood, fighting a moment with her anger and pain. Did she not labour early and late? Then she said, ever so gently,—

"The walk will be good for us both, and I can help you before I go to the theatre. Will you come?" and stooping, she kissed him.

With impatient hands he thrust her away. "Don't bother me!" he said. "Won't you ever understand my no means no? And don't wait dinner for me, I can't come for a long while yet!"

Without a word she turned and left him. "Where is the use of struggling any longer?" she questioned of her wrung heart. "He is weary of me; we would be best apart."

She and Ione dined together, but the meal was a farce; and no sooner had each gone to her own room, than Mortimer left the shop and ate his dinner in solitary sulkiness.

On the morrow Ione left for town, and Hester was to all intents and purposes alone. With a wonderful patience she bore all the petty ills that fell to her share, and if her heart ached, she made no sign; so that the workpeople wondered at her tolerance, and said amongst themselves,—

"What a shame it was the master so sorely worried her."

She was far from well too; but so long as she could hide this she did, and went about her household and professional duties with a cheerfulness that had something heroic in it.

Mortimer's meals were still as daintily prepared, his books as carefully kept, and not a rehearsal did she neglect; but soon she began to show signs of fatigue when the day's work was over.

Returning from the theatre, she would fall into heavy swoons; she could neither eat nor sleep, and her voice was no more heard singing about the house. But not a word of sympathy did Mortimer utter; in fact, at that time his conduct was characterized by indifference, amounting almost to brutality.

Once when, her self-control failing her, she burst into bitter tears, he asked, coldly,—

"What is the matter? Why are you crying?"

"I am wretched beyond measure," she answered, "and I am ill."

"Why don't you see a doctor?" he retorted. "It is your own fault that you continue ill; you will take no advice, but are bent only on having your own way at any cost!"

The reproach was cruelly unjust. She had just then sunk so much money in his business, she felt she could ill afford to spend any upon herself; but she did not say this. There was a momentary flash of anger in her deep grey eyes, then very slowly she breathed rather than said,—

"It is not my own way for which I am striving; perhaps I do not care to live."

"You mean you are tired of me?" he asked, scornfully.

"No; I do not deserve you should think that. It is you who are weary of the bond that holds us together."

"It is a lie; but you care more for others than for me, you would leave me any day for your sister. You try me and thwart me in every way. Then, too, if you were moderately careful, we should be saving money fast, but you are not."

"I think," she said, icily, "you are forgetting yourself. I have done my best to help you, and do not merit your reproach. If, indeed, you are weary of me, be honest enough to own so much, and let me go. Thank Heaven, I can at least gain a livelihood!"

"Go, if you wish. I might have known how marriage with you would end; but I was a fool, and believed you could be true."

"You shall not say that I am other," Hester cried, in a sudden burst of righteous anger. "You dare not say it."

Mortimer laughed shortly.

"Dare not! You are playing a high hand; please to remember I am your husband, and

entitled to respect, and I insist upon receiving it from you!"

She was standing by the door, her head thrown back a little; he was seated at the table; and as she looked down upon him from her superior point of vantage, she smiled scornfully.

"I would respect you if I could," she said, slowly, and then he swore at her.

Up leapt the hot blood to her cheeks. All the restraint of six long years was forgotten, all the patience swept aside in the torrent of her anger and outraged love.

"Stop!" she said. "No man has ever sworn in my presence before; I will not endure it!"

"How are you going to help yourself?" he sneered. "You are my wife, consequently my property. I can please myself as to what I say or do in your presence."

"I will not stay to endure insult; I demand to be treated at least with common courtesy. No man would refuse me that!"

"Go away!" he said, toying with the glass of wine which stood beside him. "Go away, or I will throw this at you!"

She lost all reason then, can you wonder? "Do so, if you dare!" she answered, and he in a gust of passion, tossed the contents of the glass into her face, over her dainty blue gown, with its snowy frills of lace.

With a bound she stood before him. "Now strike me," she said; "it is foolish to leave such good work incomplete, strike me!" but he thrust her aside, and went out. Her eyes followed him as he went.

Then, with a sigh which was little short of a groan, she turned and walked to her room. She did not cry, her tears and complaints were ended. Quietly and mechanically she drew off her wedding ring; just as quietly she packed her trunks, wrote a letter, dressed herself, and prepared for her journey—she had then no engagement—and, bidding her maid give her note to her master on his return, turned her back for ever on what had once been to her the happiest spot on earth.

CHAPTER II.

SHE went to London and to Ione. The latter was sitting in a low chair by the window reading, and started with a surprised cry as she entered.

"Hester! oh, what has happened?"

"The month is up, and I have come to you. I could bear it no longer!"

"Hester! Hester! what will people say?"

"I neither know nor care," she said, "Why should I? I have done no wrong!"

"But the world is so censorious; and then, dear, when Mortimer finds you have really left him, he will be sorry, and will fetch you back again. Indeed, were I you, I would return before folks have time to comment on your absence."

Hester Garwood stood up straight and stern.

"Do you mean, Ione, you do not wish me to share your life any more?"

"How can you be so unjust? I am thinking only of what is best for you."

"I am the fittest judge of that. Experience has taught me many things. So I will stay with you, and we will try to go back to the old life when we were so happy together. You and I, little sister, you and I!" and then she smiled with such infinite pathos that Ione flung herself impulsively upon her breast, and vowed that not fifty Mortimers should be strong enough to tear them apart.

"I shall not go back any more," Hester said. "I cannot trust to his promises of peace, and I was growing desperately wicked. It is best for both that we should live apart."

Ione shook her head.

"Neither is free to form other ties."

"Do you think I would fetter myself again?" Hester asked, heavily; "be yoked once more to an 'idiot or a whim.' I have

loved once and for all time. I have trusted and been deceived. All that was best and noblest in me is dead—dead as the roses in that vase beside you!"

"But they still exhale a faint fragrance," Ione said, dreamily, "and there must be some sweetness left in life for you."

With a tragic gesture Hester raised her hands above her head.

"When faith, and love, and hope are dead, what can remain to solace me? Oh! Ione, I started life with such ambitious aspirations, such dreams of happiness. Now where are the castles I built? What has become of the joy I felt so sure was in my grasp? There, child, do not fret; all the tears in the world cannot wash away my grief or blot out the past. Let us agree to forget the past six years. As Hester Melvin I have always been known; let me be Hester Melvin now, for I am no more a wife!"

"But, as Hester Melvin, Mortimer will always have a clue to your whereabouts, and can follow and claim you."

The unhappy woman sighed.

"Never fear, Ione, that he will seek me out. I tell you he is weary of this poor face of mine. And there are few of your present friends who know my history; to them let me be only your sister. I want to forget the past. I must forget it, or I shall go mad! Ione, next month your engagement terminates; what shall you do then? Do not let us drift apart again. I have money enough to last for several weeks yet, and I am sure to get work."

The young girl's face flushed.

"I would not tell you in my letters because I was afraid it would trouble you; but Mr. Stewart has begged me to go with the company to New York and other places. Lucille Duchesne, our *tragedienne*, almost refuses to go, and he is awfully worried. Oh! Hester, if only you could get the engagement, what a way out of all your troubles it would be. At all events, Lucille gives her final decision to-morrow morning; and if it is in the negative, who can tell what good luck awaits you? Now, poor dear old lady, let me get you something to eat and drink. I have been shamefully inhospitable."

"I want nothing, thank you, only to rest a little while. Oh, don't look at me like that, I am not going to faint or be ill. I am as strong as I ever was."

But she did not look so as she lay with closed eyes upon the couch, wondering what bitter evil the future held in store for her, and if Mortimer would miss her presence and long for the sound of her voice about the house.

Even now she said to her weary soul, "If he came to me promising amendment, begging pardon for his offences against me, my heart would plead for him against myself."

But Mortimer Garwood had no thought of extending the olive branch; rather he intended to reduce Hester to submission. How dared she put him to open shame? How dared she defy him so flagrantly?

He had been stunned a moment when the maid gave him her message and her letter. He thought she only intended to frighten him; he never believed for an instant that the loving wife of six long years would turn her back upon home and husband, would quietly forewear him for ever.

"It is a fit of heroics!" he muttered, savagely. "I daresay she has gone no farther than Fiesdorp or Mangotfield, and will be back to-morrow. She only wishes to frighten me," and then he turned again to her letter.

"Mortimer, for your sake as much as for my own, I am leaving you; we are utterly unsuited to each other, and I will no longer weary you with a presence that has grown hateful to you. I have loved you faithfully, I have worked for you with all the power Heaven has granted me—and oh! my dear, even you cannot accuse me of impatience or neglect of duty!"

"Before Heaven, I have done my poor best to make you happy; and it is my evil destiny that I have not succeeded. I am going to my

sister, and you need have no fear that by word or deed I shall disgrace the name you gave me when love was with us and hope was high."

"You will hear of me, perhaps, through the medium of the papers—never in any other way, unless by your own wish you recall me—and when my name drops out of them you will know that I am dead, and you are free to marry some other woman who will give you that happiness I so vainly strove to make your daily portion."

"Good-bye; in my heart there is not, and there never can be, one thought of bitterness against you, and all my prayer is that in the near future Heaven will give you your release from the wretched woman it is now your misfortune to call wife!"

Mortimer Garwood tossed the letter into the fire.

"Let her go," he said, savagely. "I have loved her truly, and she has made a laughing-stock of me. I will not seek her out. Until of her own free will she comes to me and prays my pardon, acknowledging that she sinned against me by her flight, I will never forgive her, or call her wife again."

Day after day he waited for fresh news of her, but she never wrote again. Hester had been a proud woman before love came to her; and now that love had left her, she was sustained by pride alone. Mortimer had not given sign that he needed her, until he said; "Come," she would not return to what she felt was certain misery.

She knew nothing of his remorse which he vainly strove to silence; she could not hear the voice within him crying,—

"Hester! Hester! come back to me! oh, my wife! oh, my darling wife!"

She did not guess until long, long after, how, as he turned uneasily upon his pillow, the bitter tears of manhood coursed down his cheeks—how could she, when he preserved such obstinate silence?

"I will die rather than yield," he said to his wretched heart; "the man should be the master."

And yet, indeed, there were times when he felt he must go to her, kneel at her feet, and pray for that love he knew in his inmost soul he had forfeited. He missed the sound of her light step in the hall, the music of her happy laughter; everything in the household went awry for lack of her skilful hand. The meals were ill-prepared, ill-served; and when he tried, generally vainly, to eat of them, his eyes fell on her empty chair, and then the food all but choked him.

He read the papers daily, and saw no mention of her name in them, although Ione's frequently appeared. Her funds being exhausted, she must return to him, and then—well, then he would be merciful and welcome her back; not too warmly, that would only add to her pride and independence, still with enough of pleasure to make her satisfied with her reception.

And following quickly on this resolution came the news that the Stewart Company had started for America, carrying with them the Sisters Melvin; and then Mortimer Garwood swore a bitter oath that never any more would he give shelter to his wife, or labour in her behalf; and the listening Heavens heard the cruel words. One day he too would remember them and wish them unspoken; but that day was far off yet, and his heart was like ice within him.

In due time the company reached New York, and the same ship carried out a young English gentleman named Arnold Claremont. When Hester first joined her sister, she had noticed his frequent attentances upon her, and, warned by her own most bitter experience, had prayed Ione not to listen to his protestations of affection. But when was love ever wise?

And so it came about that Ione had smiled upon Arnold's suit, and given him as much encouragement as a modest maiden may; but, slowly, the young man's attentions grew less

marked, and little by little he withdrew from Ione's society, devoting himself so much as Hester would allow to her service.

In common with her new friends and companions, he believed her a single woman; and her very indifference added fuel to the fire consuming him, made him more eager to win some sign of approval from her. And poor, pretty little Ione, watching, began to read the truth, and, for the first time in her life, she was angry with her sister. A very fury of jealousy possessed her; only pride forbade her giving any exhibition to her feelings.

"Hester," she said one day, "I think it is not right for you to pose as a single woman; it may lead to unpleasant complications. You are young yet, and not unlovely."

Hester smiled, bitterly,—

"You are alarming yourself unnecessarily. Where is the man who would look twice at this faded face, these weary eyes of mine? There is no danger, dear."

"But to our friends," persisted Ione, "you might confess the truth."

"I have no friend but you! Rest content, little sister."

"Doesn't it strike you," Ione said, tremulously, "that Mr. Claremont is—to say the least of it—rather particular in his attentions to you. I am sure he follows you persistently."

Hester's pale face flushed duski-ly.

"I thought you were the attraction," she answered, heavily. "If not, then please make Mr. Claremont understand he is to visit me no more."

But Ione had not power to deny herself the almost daily sight of the man she loved all too well, and said, quickly,—

"That would only aggravate matters. People would talk. I speak to you solely for your own good; and it is only fair you should tell Mr. Claremont you are already a wife."

"If I think it necessary I will," then catching sight of Ione's face, she cried, agitatedly, "Oh! not that, not that, dear child! Never tell me that you love this man whom you suspect to be my lover!"

But Ione thrust her away, exclaiming,—

"You are mad, Hester, even to suppose such a thing! Let me alone! Do not kiss me! I am weary of your sensational moods."

Hester fell back, and looked at her with wild eyes.

"Sister! oh, sister! are you, too, weary of me? Then it is time I were dead!" and she fell lifeless to the floor.

And yet that night she played as she never yet had played. She was the wretched heroine of "East Lynne," and her simulated woes moved even her American audience to tears. Afterwards she said that only her art saved her reason when her troubles were so great.

And slowly, but surely, from that day a barrier arose between the sisters, which was certainly not of Hester's construction, and which Ione passionately declared was not of her raising.

And now the fame the *tragedienne* had coveted had come to her, but it had lost its charm for her. It was for Mortimer she had toiled to gain it; and now he would have no share in it, and what was fame to one who had lost all joy, or hope of joy?

She was very, very unhappy. The coldness displayed by Ione hurt her beyond all words; and then it seemed to her she had committed an offence against her husband in innocently winning the love of Arnold Claremont, for, her eyes being opened by Ione, she saw with what feeling the young man regarded her, and was ashamed.

To a woman as pure as Hester, the situation was terrible, and end it in some way she would.

Her chance came sooner than she hoped for. One day the company planned an excursion to a small seaside place, and Arnold, as usual, made one of their number. As usual, too, he endeavoured to attach himself to Hester, but she so skilfully avoided him that

he was fain to content himself with Ione's society, and the girl's heart was heavy within her when she marked his air of abstraction, and the way in which his eyes followed Hester's movements.

But she laughed and chatted pleasantly all the while. Not for worlds should he guess the truth, oh! not for worlds should her companions know what a poor, blind fool she had been; not even to Hester would she confess that she loved Arnold Claremont above and beyond everything.

No one else noticed that after luncheon Hester stole away by herself, as now she so often did; no one but Ione saw that Arnold presently went away in the same direction, and upon the most trivial excuse.

She set her teeth hard, and the hazel eyes were dark with pain and anger.

"She is encouraging him," she said to herself, and tried to believe her own false words, "but to-night he shall know that she is a wife already. I love him! I love him! and I will not lose him to her!"

Mr. Claremont, who had noted well the way Hester had taken, went steadily on; and descending the cliffs, came to the shingly beach, and there amongst the boulders he found Hester.

She looked up as the sound of his steps smote on her ear, and her brow contracted slightly.

"I hoped for solitude," she said, coldly. "My head was aching badly, and I could not bear the laughter and noise above."

CHAPTER III.

He sat down on a boulder, and, as his eyes determinately held hers, said,—

"Do you know how very frigid your reception is, Miss Melvin? One would think you held me in the poorest esteem. I who have striven to make myself your friend. Why are you so cold? What is there in me that compels you so to withdraw into yourself? You are not pleased to see me here, I know; and if you say the word only, I will go."

"You need not go," answered Hester, flashing. "The beach is free to all; I do not wish to monopolize it," and she fingered the leaves of her book in a nervous way.

"What have you been reading?" he asked, glad she allowed him to stay.

"Through One Administration!"

"It's too awfully sad, Miss Melvin. Think of that plucky little Bertha, with all her pretty ways and hidden goodness, being bound for life to such a fellow as Richard Amory. Fiction ought not to be sad; and, by Jove! it makes me wild to think what that little fragile soul suffered through her husband's weaknesses."

"It is a common case," said Hester, grown suddenly pale. "The unloving wife is usually the best beloved; the woman with no soul beyond her toilet and her pleasures, the most idolized."

"I think you are very unjust to us!"

Hester laughed softly, but there was a world of bitterness and contempt in that soft sound. The blood rose to Claremont's brow.

"I did not suppose you belonged to the shrieking sisterhood," he said, hotly; "that your sole mission on earth is to deify and degrade my sex. I believed you to be purely womanly."

She put out a slender hand and touched him; in obedience to that touch he sat down again—a little sullenly it is true.

"I want you to hear me out, please. You seem to think I have developed into a 'strong-minded female.' I wish I had, for then, perhaps, I should be spared much pain. You think I speak without experience. I do not. My lines have not fallen in pleasant places for long years. I have not met with so much love and faith that I should trust each and all without question."

"You mean," he said, heavily, "some fellow has been false to you!"

"No, not that; there is only one man I loved, and he made me his wife."

"What!" he almost shouted, and his face went white. Then after a moment—"you poor girl—he died!"

"No; he still lives, and I am still his wife; but there were reasons why we should part, and so I left him."

"The fault was not yours!" he cried, impulsively, "he alone was to blame! Not an angel from heaven should convince me that you are other than the woman that I reverence and love."

It had come, as she knew it must, this confession of his passion; and yet it startled her, and her face was very white as she rose and confronted him.

"By the dignity of wifehood, which still fences me round, I pray you say no more of love. Think what you will of me, I have grown to value common opinion at its true worth. I only want to keep my name clean and unspotted. It is, this with a half choked sob, my only goodly possession now."

He went to her side, and forcibly took her hands in his.

"You will not cry out against him, you will not publish your wrongs; but I know that in some dreadful way he ill-treated you, and put you to scorn. Why do you hug your fetters? I am rich. Let me help you to break them, to give you that freedom you must crave, and which alone will enable you to accept the love I offer."

"My wrongs admit of no redress," she said, coldly. "My husband was never false to me, and with all my heart I love him still. Let go my hands; how dare you hold me? If by my silence I have wronged you, I ask your forgiveness, and I beg you to forget me, and keep my most unhappy secret. A woman who has left her husband is not often regarded charitably."

"Why will you cling to him?" passionately. "You are blind to your own happiness. Tell me, what was his sin against you?"

"I will tell you nothing," proudly. "Your proffered help is an insult to me, because you have confessed yourself my lover. Mr. Claremont, if death should free me to-morrow, and only death could do that, I would not trust the remainder of my life to any man's keeping; because I never could love again, and I have no faith in any living creature."

"You protest too much," he said, angrily; "but I swear, if you were free, I could make you my wife in less than six months. Hester, be reasonable; tell me how I am to free you, in what way I may win you. It is your happiness I seek."

She looked fully at him.

"He said so once, and I know now the value of man's oath," and she laughed. "I know now in what light men regard their wives; and were I free, I should still decline the honour you offer me. For the rest, say no more on the subject. I ought not, and I will not listen to you; and now, please leave me."

"You have treated me unfairly all the way along," he said, angrily. "You should have told me the truth before. You must have guessed my feelings for you. Why did I come come out here if not to be near you? Why have I followed you from place to place giving no thought to any other woman, seeing and hearing only you? I tell you, if you are lost to me, I don't care what may happen. You make up my existence. Why have you treated me so mercilessly? Why must I suffer for another man's sin?"

"I did not guess," Hester said, gravely, "that you cared for me until—until others warned me; and, from that day Heaven knows I have tried to avoid you. I have confessed my sorrow. I would remedy my fault if I could. Perhaps in a little while you will forgive me, because men so easily forget; and in the meanwhile I pray you to go your way and let me go mine. We are best apart!"

"We are best apart!" he echoed. "I

think I could kill you now for the anguish you have given me to bear!"

And then he rushed wildly up the cliffs, and as he was lost to her sight Hester sank moaning upon the beach. Life was too cruel to bear. Oh, that she could die!

Through the homeward journey, Arnold devoted himself to Ione, until the girl's face beamed with a new delight, and her beauty took a tender shade, her deep eyes grew instinct with a joy that, alas! was groundless.

"To-morrow after rehearsal I want to see you," he said, at parting; "can you manage to give me a quiet half hour? Will you be so kind, Miss Ione?"

The colour came into her cheeks.

"You may meet me at the stage entrance," she answered. "Hester does not go to rehearsal to-morrow. She is off for the night. We play 'She Stoops to Conquer,' and my sister is not cast for the piece."

"You may expect me, and I don't know how to thank you," and then he raised the little hand with a courtly gesture to his lips, and that night, at least, Ione went to bed happy.

She dreamt of a happy ending to her love story, of a reconciliation between Mortimer and Hester; and when she woke rather late in the morning, so full was she of her joy that she voluntarily kissed the pale sister who had been as a mother to her since her mother died.

Hester flashed, the beautiful mouth quivered, and the grey eyes flared with tears.

"Ione," she whispered, "Ione, little sister, we are going to be happy again together. The cloud between us has passed."

"Oh, yes," laughed Ione, "it has quite passed. We have been like a couple of naughty children. I don't know why; but for the future we will be upon our best behaviour. Oh! Hester, there is no need to strangle me. Why, I declare you are crying!"

"Only for very joy, dear; I thought you had begun to hate me!"

"You stupid old creature! I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself for airing such notions. Now help me to dress, like the darling you are, or I shall be late at rehearsal, and old Stewart will storm. You know how autocratic he can be, and is."

So Hester plaited the lovely hair into innumerable braids, arranged and re-arranged the tiny curls about the white brow; and having made her young sister as lovely as she could, saw her depart with a smile on her lips, and great unshed tears in her eyes.

Oh, Heaven! grant that Ione's life might be happier than her own had been, for Ione was not strong to suffer.

All through that rehearsal Ione's heart beat only to one word, and that word was Arnold. He had begged her to see him alone, and what could such an entreaty mean but that he loved her, and she, after all, had been mistaken with regard to his feeling for Hester.

At the stage door he met her.

"I have a dog cart waiting," he said. "I thought we might talk more pleasantly and profitably if we were quite alone. I am going to take you out to a place I know. I am not a stranger to America; all my boyhood was spent here; my mother was an American," and as he talked he was assisting her into her seat.

She looked so bright and pretty that a man might well lose his heart to her, and yet Arnold Claremont in that hour felt not the least little throb of love for her. It was of Hester he was thinking—Hester, who would have none of him, who belonged already to a luckier man than he.

And when they were well upon their way he began to speak of her, until, with a passionate throb of jealousy, Ione realised why he had begged her to share this jaunt, and all the old jealousy of Hester was revived in two-fold force.

"And so you want to know her story," she said, in a low voice. "Why did you not ask it of her?"

"I did, but she would not go beyond the slightest hints."

"I scarcely wonder," said Ione. "the story does not redound to her credit. Understand, Mr. Claremont, Hester is all that is good and pure; but she is not quite womanly enough, and she expected too much of the man she married. She wanted to have a lover all her life. She would not submit to a husband's caprices, and so they parted; and I do not think Mortimer was wholly to blame. Hester is too *exigante*!"

This after Hester's long toil for her. Oa, it was cruel!

"Miss Melvin, pardon, I do not know by what other name I should address your sister, never struck me as being a difficult woman to live with!" Arnold said, coldly.

"She lives on the heights!" said Ione, in a gentler tone than she had previously used; "most folks are content with the levels!"

"But," he argued, "is there no redress for her? Surely her husband must be a brute below pity or pardon! What is to be done, Miss Melvin?"

She flashed on him then,—

"You love her!" she said, all the notes of her sweet voice jarred and out of tune, "and so you least of any must be her advocate. Mr. Claremont, there were faults on both sides, and between man and wife no one has a right to interfere, least of all you!"

"I love her!" he answered, "and her happiness is my desire!"

Ione stretched out her hand to him,—

"If you love her, leave her! She has only her good name for her fortune!"

"That I shall not take from her; but loving her, I must serve her!"

"In what way? Surely where I failed you cannot succeed, and your interference would probably anger Mortimer Garwood the more against her!" said Ione, and her heart was black with jealousy. "What is it you propose to do?"

"I have thought of nothing yet; but you know, as well as I, there is only one way of release for her, and that is through the divorce court!"

"Fortunately," said Ione, "the marriage vows are more binding in England than America; and neither Mortimer nor his wife have sinned against each other in the sense you mean. Nothing but death can release Hester. And, Mr. Claremont, as a man you should strive with your passion; as a gentleman, you should leave Mrs. Garwood unmolested."

His face was very gloomy.

"You seem to have a very poor opinion of me, Miss Melvin; you also seem to think that a man can trample on his love at his own will and pleasure. I wish I could act upon your very comfortable belief; and, for the rest, I shall not harm your sister by word or deed; you need have no fear."

Her eyes were full of tears as she lifted them to his.

"You, like Hester, are bent upon misunderstanding me! I speak only for her good and yours," and then she hid her face and wept a little, and the man's heart melted towards her—she was so pretty, so affectionate, so anxious to serve Hester—and laying his hand upon hers, he said, gently,—

"Don't cry, dear, I spoke like a brute; but upon my word I did not mean it. Next to Hester, there is no woman on earth I esteem so highly as you. Let us be friends again?"

She feebly smiled as she looked into his handsome worn face, and all her heart cried out for his love; she scarcely could refrain from telling all the wretched truth. With a visible effort she recovered her lost control.

"Of course we are friends, and I hope shall always remain so," she said. "It should take more than a few hasty words to change our mutual regard;" but she was very silent through the remainder of the drive, and on their return, bidding him a hasty good-bye, she went up to her own room, there to sob as though her very heart would break.

"She has everything good and glad," she murmured, resentfully, "she might at least have left me his heart. Did she grudge it so sorely she needs must steal it away and leave me desolate? I wish I were dead!—or she!"

A light step outside, a hand upon the door, and then Hester entered, looking very pale and weary.

"Aren't you well, dear?" she asked, bending over the girl, caressingly, "or has anything gone awry to-day?"

"Everything is out of gear," Ione retorted, sitting up, and flashing an angry glance at Hester, "and all the mischief is of your working. You have stolen my lover from me, and wrecked all my life, and you care less than nothing! Women like you have no heart, and no pity. I do not wonder Mortimer found it so hard to live with you!"

"Say no more!" Hester answered, brokenly; "leave me at least the belief that I did not wrong him when I came away—that thought has been my support throughout. And, little sister, try sometimes to remember the old love that used to exist between us—that still lives here in my poor, bleeding heart—and be merciful to me!" and then, with a gesture of infinite sorrow and despair, she turned and left her.

CHAPTER IV.

A YEAR had passed since Hester left her home, and in that year things had gone ill with Mortimer. Extravagant servants had wasted his substance; his home, of which he used to be so proud, had a slipshod air; his books were in utter confusion; and often he was compelled to refuse work for lack of funds to execute it, for his only capital had been his clever, industrious hands, until Hester flung her earnings generously into the business.

Soon he was compelled to discharge his foreman; then one hand after another received dismissal, and folks began to talk.

The shop had a deserted air, his tradesmen grew troublesome and unkind, and no one was astonished when Mortimer Garwood was proclaimed bankrupt.

He passed his examination honourably; but his proud heart was crushed, and all the energy seemed gone from his life.

Never again could he hold up his head in the place where all men knew him. He must go away, and then, perhaps, in fresh scenes, he would forget all the sorrows and mistakes of his life; perhaps he should even forget her for whom his soul was hungry. So he went to London. She was there he knew, and it might chance that he should see her.

"I have been a fool, and mad!" he thought, bitterly. "I never was worthy of her, I never should have bound her to me; but, as Heaven is above me, I loved her! Now I would crawl to her feet and kiss the hem of her garment, if only she would not spurn me. But how can I go to her now, bankrupt and beggared? Would she not think I sought her help, that I intended to live upon her bounty. No; I will retrieve my lost position, and then I will go to her, humbly and prayerfully, and, being generous, she will forgive."

So he set to work to find employment, and, being skilful, he quickly obtained it; but he did not live like a man in comfortable circumstances. Every penny he could hoard he hoarded. It was for her. It brought the day of their reunion nearer and nearer yet; and he looked on the little heap of coins with glistening eyes.

He wondered that Hester and Ione were playing at different houses. Soon he learned that they lived apart, and he wondered the more.

He guessed nothing, knew nothing of the breach between the sisters; of Ione's ingratitude, and Hester's grief; of the scene between the two women when Ione had fiercely upbraided Hester, when she had spoken words

which, though they might be forgiven, could never be forgotten.

Then each went her separate way, but Ione kept herself acquainted with all her sister's movements, and knew how, day by day, Arnold haunted her steps, and said, contemptuously, to herself,—

"She is growing old and faded, he will weary of her soon."

And then she looked at her own fresh loveliness, and wondered over his blindness, and prayed wildly that in time his heart would turn to her.

One night she was not to appear at the theatre, and, pleased with her unwonted freedom, she went with some friends to the Corinthian, where Hester was playing.

She had no particular wish to see the performance, which was "The Lady of Lyons," but she wanted to assure herself that Arnold Claremont was not of the audience.

Her eyes, bright with anxiety, wandered from stall to stall, from boxes to pit; and then she gave a great start, and almost cried out in her astonishment, for there before her was Mortimer, his gaze bent upon the stage where Hester stood!

He was worn and aged, but she would have known him anywhere; the pallid, dark face, and the big brown eyes were not to be mistaken.

Never for a moment did her gaze wander from him, and slowly an idea grew in her mind, slowly she formed the resolve to acquaint him with Arnold's story. He was always jealous, he had never forfeited his right of control over Hester, and she (Ione) felt, if he knew all the truth, he would quickly assert his authority.

"And when she is safely in her own home again," she said to herself, "I shall have power to win my lover back to my side."

With ill-concealed impatience she waited for the end of the play, and then rising, she begged her friends to excuse her, saying she had seen a friend of her childhood amongst the audience, and wished to exchange speech with him.

Drawing hood and cloak around her, she hurried to the pit entrance, and presently Mortimer drew near, and then passed her. She followed him quickly, and once in the open street, gained upon him, laid her hand upon his arm, and whispered,—

"Mortimer, it is I—Ione—and I want to speak with you."

She did not understand his shamed and crestfallen look, and went on hurriedly,—

"We were always friends, Mortimer, and I want you to remember I do not consider Hester, altogether blameless in the past. I saw you almost as soon as the play began and determined to speak to you. There is so much I have to tell. But first give me your arm, and let me hear what brings you to London?"

Mechanically, he suffered her to lean upon him. He had not yet recovered the start her appearance had given him, and speech was difficult to him then. So Ione said,—

"You must not visit Hester's faults upon me; I want to help you both if I can. How worn and ill you are!"

"There is reason why I should be," he answered, wearily. "I have gone through endless troubles since she went away!"

"Poor old Mortimer! Now be a good sensible boy, and for once forget your pride. Go to Hester and compel her to return home with you; it would be best for her and for you. You know how cruelly the world judges women who have left their lords, and I want to see you happy together once more."

"Then you don't know what has chanced to me?" he questioned. If you did, you would hardly advise me to break in upon her new life. I am bankrupt in all good things. I have no home to which I could take her, everything has failed with me! and now, though Heaven sees I love her more than ever I did in the past, I cannot go to her as a suppliant. I must retrieve something of my old

position—I work early and late to do that—and the only hope that sustains me is that in some not far-distant day I may plead my cause and win her forgiveness.

"Ione, you can never guess all that I have endured—all the long weeks of yearning,—all the anguish of self-reproach, the miserable consciousness that I, and I alone, had brought about my own ruin and misery, and given her so bitter a cup to drink. When I lost all, I came to town, because I knew she was here, and it is still a joy if a cruel one, sometimes to see her without being seen. To hear the notes of her dear voice, and think that there will yet be a time when it will sound in our own home again for me. I don't deserve it—but, oh, Heaven, how I desire it," he cried, with a tragic gesture, and Ione listened impatiently to him; but when he had ended, she said, gently,—

"You poor thing! how you have suffered! Why did you not write to me? I would have gladly helped you. And if only you will be a little reasonable. Hester will rejoice to give you a fresh start. She is generous, and, for all her pride and silence, she loves you yet. But a new danger threatens you. There is another man who values her even as you do—who would make her his wife to-morrow, if the law allowed and she would consent."

He started violently and a look of fierce jealousy darkened his face.

"Who is he?" he asked; "how dare he raise his eyes to my wife—my wife, I say!"

"Hush, we are in the street, and you must not excite yourself unnecessarily. You will believe me when I say that Hester cares as little for him as for the Sultan of Turkey; and he loved her before ever he knew she was a married woman, and now he cannot easily conquer his infatuation, but follows her from place to place, and I want you to end this. You know how ready the world is to condemn the innocent, and neither you nor I wish her name to be tossed lightly hither and thither. You must use your authority to save her."

"What authority have I?" he questioned, wearily. "Do you suppose she would listen to me now? And if she left the boards, what have I to offer her in exchange? Oh, Hester! Hester! I love you, but I have lost you—my wife! my wife!"

"Not lost her! Oh, do listen to me and control yourself. Is she to drift with the current, and be engulfed at last?"

"What is his name?" Mortimer demanded. "This man who presumes to love her—who is he?"

"You will do nothing rashly?" Ione questioned, just a little afraid of the storm she was raising. "Promise me so much?"

"I promise!"

"He is Arnold Claremont, a gentleman by birth and fortune. If you would see him, go almost any night to the Corinthian. He will sit in the box nearest the stage, and he will have no interest in the play apart from Hester. You cannot mistake him. He is tall, broad-shouldered and fair. At the close of the performance he will hurry to the stage-entrance and wait for Hester's coming."

Mortimer drew his breath sharply.

"And she!" he gasped.

"She will fling him a careless word perhaps, and with a scornful look pass on. Hester does not forget she is your wife."

"To-morrow I will be there; but, Ione, I do not wish her to hear of me. You in your turn must promise to say nothing of this interview. I would die rather than return a pauper to her; only I shall know how to protect what is still my own."

"And you will do nothing to harm Mr. Claremont?"

"Not if he proves honourable. Now let me take you home. Where are you living?"

"Oh," evasively, "too far from here for me to trouble you; if you will only call a cab, I will drive there. I am really very tired, and have a hard day's work before me."

"I want you to feel, Ione, how very grateful I am to you for your interest in me. It

has done me good to see and speak with you, and for your sake I will try to act with prudence. You are not living with her?"

"No, we quarrelled, and I felt it best to part, so that we might remain friends. Then, too, the Corinthian and the Clysie are far apart, and it is more convenient for me to live near to my work. Good-bye, Mortimer; keep a good heart, and all will come right!" Then she stepped into the cab he called, and was driven away, neither giving her address nor asking his; and in a maze of thought, he walked towards the one poor room he called home.

He was filled with mad jealousy; but it said something for the man's love and faith, that never for a moment did he think Hester had encouraged her lover, or swerved from her loyalty to himself.

"Heaven bless her!" he said to his dull heart. "Heaven bless her, and make me worthier her!"

The next night he brushed his shabby clothes, and took especial pains with his simple toilet. Then he went in the direction of the Corinthian. He had eaten but sparingly all day, because of to-night's expense, and it seemed to him he was even then robbing Hester of her due, when he abstracted the necessary money from his pitifully small hoard.

He did not choose a prominent seat, it was no part of his scheme to discover himself; but he was careful to select a good place for espionage. And when the play began he lifted his heavy eyes to the box Ione had spoken of, and there saw a fair-haired giant he felt instinctively was his rival. Even to his jealous heart he acknowledged that Hester would have made a happier choice, had she been free, had she elected him for her husband.

The fair handsome patrician face, the noble presence, might well appeal to woman's heart. With a sick sense of inferiority he watched Arnold through all the play; noted the eager light in his blue eyes when Hester appeared, the flush of pride when the audience applauded her, and wished in his heart he had left her free to marry a man worthier her, than he could ever be.

In the midst of a storm of applause the curtain was rung down; but Hester must appear again and yet again. Bouquets were showered before her, amongst them Arnold's was the loveliest; but she allowed it to lie disregarded at her feet, she never once glanced towards the donor, and Mortimer's heart throbbed with passionate exultation. She still cared for him, this delicate lovely woman with the grave sweet face and tragic eyes. Oh, yes! Heaven be thanked, she cared for him yet; and with Heaven's help he would one day deserve the treasure of her love.

When all was ended, when he could no longer feast his hungry eyes upon her tender beauty, for to him she was beautiful, he went hastily round to the stage entrance. Arnold was already there; and Mortimer, standing far back in the shadows, waited for his wife's coming.

He knew the slight form as soon as it issued from the door, and caught his breath. How could he let her pass without one word?

Arnold had already advanced, in his anger Mortimer felt he could murder him, and as Hester drew near, he accosted her.

"Miss Melvin, stay just one moment. I must speak to you!"

"You must choose a more fitting time, Mr. Claremont," she answered; "and if you would understand how little I desire any intercourse with you, I should be infinitely obliged."

"I will be heard," said Arnold, passionately, and Mortimer longed to strike him down. "You shall not always ignore me thus."

"Let me pass," answered Hester, and swept by him to the carriage waiting for her.

She little guessed that as she went, her husband's hands touched her cloak softly,

that his eyes followed her in blessing, that his voice breathed her name in accents of passion and despair. And when she had gone, he stepped from his hiding-place, and striking Arnold straight upon the shoulder, said, harshly,—

"You and I have a heavy reckoning; if you are a man, you will answer to me to-night for your conduct."

CHAPTER V.

ARNOLD turned sharply.

"What the dence do you mean?" he asked, with quick passion. "Who and what are you?" Then, as his eyes wandered over the poor shabby garments, an expression of contempt came into them. "You are trying to blackmail me," he said, "but, my good fellow, you have come to the wrong quarter for success. I give you two seconds in which to effect your escape; if you make any delay, I shall have you arrested."

Mortimer Garwood laughed bitterly. "You judge a man by his clothing, he said; 'you are not the only fool in that respect. I want nothing of you. I would starve rather than take alms of you; but I do insist that from to-night you shall leave Miss Melvin unmolested!'"

"What have you to do with her? How dare you take her name upon your lips? Out of my way, fellow!" and he made as if to pass, but Mortimer stood before him, barring his way, and in his mien there was a certain dignity which impressed Arnold against his will.

"I have the greatest right on earth to protect her against such men as you," he said, quietly. "She is my wife!"

"Your wife! Then you are the contemptible wretch who made her life a very purgatory? What are you doing here? By Heaven, if you give her fresh cause for sorrow, I will kill you as I would kill a rat. What could she see in you that she should love you to her own destruction? Go your own way, and leave her free to go home."

"She is my wife," Mortimer said again, "nothing can alter that fact; and I know she loves me still, unworthy as I am! I ask nothing of her, I shall not even make known my existence to her until I can give her a comfortable home; but I will not tamely submit to your attentions to her—they are repulsive to her, and an insult. For a less offence than yours men have been stricken down—and to night there is murder in my heart."

Arnold smiled.

"Loud talkers are never great doers. If you want to punish me for my insolence in addressing your ill-treated wife, do so. Let us stand face to face, each accepting the consequences of our meeting, without complaint. I know of a nice quiet little spot, not fifty miles from here, where we can fight it out unmolested. I treat you as I would treat a man of honour Mortimer winced at that, and proposed we should dispense with seconds. At any cost her name must not be dragged into publicity; and the one who survives must never divulge the secret to her. Come to my chambers and choose your weapon; then to-morrow you must go down to Hedworth—it is a village in Essex; there I will meet you and show you the spot most suitable for our encounter. The following morning we meet before the world is astir, and the one who falls must take his chance—the other is to take refuge in flight. Do you agree to my terms?"

"Yes; let us go now to your rooms."

Side by side they walked through the half-deserted streets, speaking no word; and arriving at his chambers, Arnold Claremont led the way into them. As Mortimer's weary eyes took in every sign of luxury, he sighed heavily. How much Claremont had to give Hester. How little he could offer her! With a passionate gesture he said,—

"I hope I may be the one to fall; you will

make her happier than I have done. Heaven forgive my brutality. Now, let me see the weapons. To think a little thing like this should carry certain death with it," as he took up a small, beautifully mounted revolver and examined it. "Well, this is my choice—do you use its fellow?"

"Yes," briefly. Then after a pause, "Have you money enough to carry you down to Hedworth?"

"Yes. If not, I would tramp there. I am not a beggar. To-morrow evening you will find me waiting you at the station. This is a matter that admits of no delay and no compromise," and without another word he went downstairs, and into the lovely night.

Sleep would not come to him for all his woeing; and as he tossed to and fro, his mind was full of Hester. Suppose he should fall—he was no marksman; suppose he should die, and that without one word or smile of forgiveness from her!

Was she always to remember him as a cruel tyrant, and, sheltered by Claremont's care, grow in time to loathe his memory?

He flung out his arms upon the table, and, burying his face upon them, broke into the hoarse and terrible sobs of manhood.

He was not worthy she should come to him, he had treated her with uniform unkindness even when most he loved her; and yet, oh! yet, if she would but come to him now, she might reproach, revile him as she would, and never an angry word would he utter in reply; because now he knew himself in all his littleness, and was shamed through all his being. How could he die and leave her no sign?

And then suddenly he rose, and, drawing out pen and paper from a tiny recess, wrote rapidly awhile.

He addressed his letter to her, adding a note to the effect that if he did not return from his journey his landlord was to forward it to Miss Melvin at the Corinthian.

Then he lay down and tried again to sleep; but at dawn he rose heavy-eyed and unfreshed, and began his few preparations, which were of the simplest nature.

Then he went to his work, not staying all day for food or drink, and at five he left and travelled down to Hedworth, noting with a sigh of regret, how much he was reducing his little hoard.

Claremont travelled by the same train, only he went first-class; and neither knew the other was near until Hedworth was reached.

"So you have come," said Arnold. "Where do you lodge?"

"I don't know yet, I've to look about me first. At what time do we meet to-morrow, and where?"

"It will be light enough at two. I am going to the White Hart, the principal inn here. You might get lodgings at the Dragon, it is quiet, cheap and respectable. And as we don't wish to be seen together, you had better follow me at a distance to the spot I have selected. If you do not approve it, you can say so."

The blood was red in Mortimer's cheeks as he fell back, and a great rage filled his heart; but he was learning now to control himself, and gave no sign of his pain and pride.

They went quickly down a broad strip of road; then Arnold opened a gate, and they passed up a lane overhung by magnificent oaks; then through another gate across a wide park, and so to a lonely spot skirting a wood.

"This is the place," said Arnold. "A good many folk pass here as the day gets up, but so early in the morning we shall not be disturbed, and we are too far from from the village to be detected. Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly. If I should die, you will by some means let her know her freedom. I should like to think of her with my last thoughts as being happy once again, just as she used to be."

"I will let her know. I suppose you can find the way here?"

"Yes, I shall not miss my appointment," grimly. "I wish it had not come to this; but I can see no other remedy for our ill, and with all my heart I hate you that you have striven to win my wife from me and to dishonour her. Man, was there no other woman who could please you? Must you work to alienate her?"

"We will not talk of such things now," answered Arnold, coldly. "We have said all that is necessary; and now I will leave you, trusting to your promise. If you fail me, I shall know what to think."

"I shall not fail you," grimly. "I hate you too much for that!" and then with gloomy eyes he watched the other walking towards the park.

That night he slept at the humble Dragon, where the accommodation was of the most primitive kind; and his rival fared well at the White Hart, and half unconsciously prayed that he might be the victor in the coming fray, so that at last Hester might be his; for he never doubted his power to win her if once Mortimer was lost to her by death.

Strangely enough, he slept well that night, waking just as the first grey streak of dawn entered the room.

Then he rose, and dressing himself hurriedly, looked to his revolver, crept downstairs like a thief, and stepped out of the parlour window on to the stones below; and, as swiftly and noiselessly as he could, made his way to the rendezvous. Mortimer, haggard and pale, was waiting him.

"You are punctual," he said. "Now measure out the distance, and let the play begin. You are a gentleman and understand these things. I am a poor workman, with no knowledge but of my own craft!"

"If you repent your bargain, say so!" answered Arnold, coldly.

"I do not repent; and courage is not confined to your own class, Mr. Claremont. Please lose no time with your preparations."

Arnold said no more; but having measured the distance, he bade his opponent look to his revolver, and then the foolish contest began.

The first shot flew harmlessly by; but at the second Mortimer gave a loud cry, for Arnold Claremont fell to the ground like a log.

Mortimer hastened to him, laid his trembling hand upon the almost pulseless heart. Then he turned and fled like a mad thing from the scene of slaughter.

He caught the first train to town. He dared stay no longer in that dreadful place. If Claremont were dead! If Hester should learn the truth! Oh, was there not some place on earth where he could hide himself!

What had he done? What had he done? Would not everyone who looked upon him know him for what he was? And that awful, motionless figure, lying so prostrate beneath the deepening blue of the sky. Would he not see it always!—always in the noonday glare—"in the dead, unhappy night!"

What peace was there for him? How could he plead with blood-stained hands for Hester's love and companionship?

He could never tell how he got through that awful journey, how he lived through the anguish of that terrible day; but at last he reached his dreary lodging, and, throwing himself upon his bed, fell into a deep and dreadful swoon, from which he did not wake for very long.

No one came near him—in the world he stood alone—there was no one to say a comfortable word to him, and in his weakness and despair he shed many a bitter tear.

Then he rose and tried to prepare some remembrance of a meal; but he could not eat, the thought of that silent awful form made him turn sick and loathing from the scarcely appetising food.

But with the new day came new strength, and, dressing with care, he made his way to his place of employment.

The master met him coldly. He had

absented himself a whole day without leave. He wished to employ only steady and tried workmen; trade was slack, too, and he might consider himself dismissed.

He went out into the streets like one in a dream. What was he to do? Was not Hester lost to him for ever? He bought a paper of a ragged newsboy, and searched anxiously down the columns until he came to the following paragraph:—

"Yesterday morning the body of a gentleman was found on the confines of Hedworth Woods. On examination it was discovered he had been wounded by some miscreant just below the heart. From papers found upon him it is ascertained he is Mr. Arnold Claremont, of Claremont, Warwickshire. He is at present lying at the White Hart Inn, Hedworth, but little hope is entertained of his recovery. No arrests have been made."

He was not dead then. Whilst there was life there was hope! Oh, Heaven in its mercy grant Claremont might live! If he died! What then was he—Mortimer?

All day he wandered about the streets seeking employment and finding none. In an aimless way he drifted to Victoria Station, and there he saw Ions, white and frightened-looking.

Their eyes met, and she came towards him with the swiftness of a bird.

"I have read it all in the papers," she gasped, and I know that you did it. If he dies, I shall denounce you. I am going to him now. He has no friends, and there is only me to love him!"

Then she stepped into a carriage, and was whirled from his sight; but until she could see him no longer, she bent her white, wrathful face and angry eyes upon him.

He turned away sick at heart, and once more began his search for work, though, indeed, he hardly cared now whether or no he obtained it.

There was no good left for him in life, and the river lay before him, shining like silver beneath the summer moon. At any time he could end rest there. Rest! ah, that was all he craved, except the touch of his wife's pure lips to his.

Day after day the weary search for work went on. Day after day his little hoard wasted, and hope grew faint within his breast. Of Claremont he had no news. To Hester in her prosperity he could not go; although in his heart he knew she would gladly give him of her substance, would look on him with pitying eyes, and blame herself for all the evil that had come to him.

"But," he said, "I will die rather than link her life to mine. If he is dead, her whole life would be shadowed by my crime if once I made known my existence to her. Heaven bless her, and let no sin of mine make her life heavier to bear!"

Soon there began the grim fight with poverty. There came a day when he drew out the last shilling from his hiding place. He had lived frugally enough, but his little store was exhausted now, and before him there loomed only the river or the workhouse. He preferred the former, and yet—yet he would like to think at the last she had stood beside him, had kissed his clay old lips and unconscious face, had hung about him with loving observances. With such thoughts he climbed to his wretched room, and there fell prone upon the floor knowing nothing, hearing nothing, lapped for the while in blessed unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VI.

It was days before Arnold Claremont recovered consciousness. Some labourers had found him lying where he had fallen and conveyed him to the inn, and thither Ions went, feeling thankful that at present she had no engagement.

She wrote no word of her movements to Hester—it was Hester's husband who had all

but murdered the man she loved, and her heart was bitter against them both. The comfortable landlady looked up in surprise as the extremely pretty and stylishly dressed young lady entered the sanded bar-parlour.

"I have come to nurse Mr. Claremont," said Ione as quietly as she could. She was trembling in every limb, and her face was white.

"Law sakes! and glad I am you've come," said Mrs. Boram. "What with the house to see after, the men to serve, and all that I ain't got time to attend to him properly, and I don't trust that Ann Wyatt no farther than I can see her. She's with him now, but she don't know no more about nursing than this here broomstick. Poor gentleman he's awful bad. I hope he won't die here, it 'ld make it so bad for business. Folks don't care to come to a house what's got a corpse in it!"

"May I go to him?" asked Ione, cutting short the woman's garrulous speech. "I can do better than Ann Wyatt, at least."

"I'll take you up at once, miss. Maybe you're his sister?"

"No!" briefly.

"His sweetheart, then?" and afraid at the last moment she might be denied admission to him, Ione bowed.

"Ah, poor thing! It powerful hard for you, then. 'Deed, I hope he'll recover for your sake, miss. This way, please, and I've got a nice spare room you can have—and I'm sure I'll wait on you my best. I'm really sorry for you, that I am!" and talking all the while, she led the way up the broad shallow stairs until they came to a door which Mrs. Boram opened quietly, showing the interior of a very spacious room, comfortably furnished and scrupulously clean.

A French bedstead occupied the centre of the apartment. On the bed lay Arnold with white unconscious face and closed eyes. By him sat a woman half asleep. Ione entered quietly.

"You may go," she said, "I have come to nurse Mr. Claremont. Tell me to what extent I am indebted to you?"

The woman rubbed her eyes, yawned, stretched herself, and then, sulkily, named a far larger sum than she had hoped to receive.

Ione supplemented it by several shillings, then coldly dismissing her, proceeded to draw off hat and mantle, Mrs. Boram watching her with interested eyes.

"Do you know any trustworthy person I could engage to relieve me when I feel rest necessary?" asked the girl.

"There's a cousin o' mine miss, over at Haddington. She's out of employ jest now. She charges powerful high; but she knows her business and does her dooty by them as employs her."

"Price is no object," said Ione; "send for her at once."

"Yes, miss; my man'll drive over and fetch her, and if you'll excuse the liberty, miss, I think you'd better have a bite and a sup. You ain't looking too strong yourself."

"Bring me a glass of any wine you may have in the house. I could not eat. At what time do you expect the Doctor?"

"He'll be here d'rectly, miss. He always comes morning and evening, and it's close on his time. Now I'll get you the wine. Then I'll make you some tea as soon as the water boils. If I'd known you'd been coming, I'd ha' had all ready for you."

Then, as she hurried away, Ione found herself alone with the man for whose sake she had deserted her sister and risked all things. She never thought of the conventionalities; she remembered nothing her many friends and a cruel world might say of her conduct. She only felt she loved him; she only knew that but for Heaven's great mercy she must lose him.

Not a word did she speak, not a movement did she make, until Mrs. Boram returned with the wine. Then she simply thanked and dismissed her, and, falling on her knees beside

the bed, prayed for that dear life, as never in all her twenty-one years she had prayed before; and when she rose, she bent over him, and, with ashamed eyes and crimsoned cheeks, she kissed his brow and lips. Then hid her face in her hands, half afraid that even in his unconsciousness, Arnold might be aware of her mad caresses.

Presently the doctor came—a short, stalwart-looking man, apparently about forty. He looked at the girl with keen blue eyes, and said in a quick, sharp way,—

"Mrs. Boram informs me that you are my patient's fiancée; that being the case, I suppose I may safely leave him to your care."

Ione bowed; for the moment she could not speak, and Dr. Rymore went on in the same brusque way.

"I had better tell you at once, that Mr. Claremont is in a most critical condition. If you wish for further advice have it. For my own part, I do not think it necessary. What he requires is greatest care and attention, constant watchfulness. Nurse Brown will be with you shortly, she is experienced and trustworthy. If there is any change in the patient during the night, send for me. Good evening," and he went out quickly as though he had not a moment to spare.

Ione wished he had been more sympathetic; his dry manner and sharp tones jarred on her tortured heart, and with a little passionate sob, she said,—

"Oh, my dear one! oh, my dear one! there is no one to love you but me, no one to care if you live or die!" and she wept a little in her despair and desolation.

But she was quite composed when Nurse Brown arrived. She was a middle-aged woman of comfortable appearance, and her very presence was a relief to the weary girl. Quietly and methodically she set to work to "straighten the room," as she called it. Then she examined the medicine bottles, read the instructions Dr. Rymore had left for her; finally she turned to Ione, saying,—

"You had better lie down, you look tired; and if there is any change I'll wake you. You're sure to sleep, you're so weary."

So Ione, who really could scarcely lift her heavy lids, allowed herself to be made comfortable on the couch, and slept so long, that the full morning light was streaming into the room when she awoke. Nurse Brown was sitting erect and wide awake. She turned with a smile as Ione rubbed her eyes and said, with self-reproach,—

"Oh, why did I sleep so long? How selfish you must have thought me!"

"Not at all, miss. I'm used to this sort of thing, and you are not. I wouldn't have roused you for a great deal, because, if you hadn't slept, I should have had two patients on my hands instead of one. You were fairly exhausted; lie there a little while longer. Cousin Boram is getting your breakfast ready; when you've had that, I'll take a spell of rest, and you shall do the watching. He," with a glance at Arnold, "must not be left a moment. Afterwards you must take a walk. Excuse my boldness, miss; but you're young and inexperienced, and so need some one to look after you. Haven't you got a friend or a sister who could stay with you in your trouble?"

Thinking of Hester, Ione flashed hotly, and a sharp pain filled her heart. By her own fault, she had lost that dear guide and friend. Then, with a little negative gesture, she said,—

"I have no one, I am all alone in the world!"

"Poor child! for your sake as well as for his own, I hope the poor gentleman will recover. You are too young and pretty to have no protector. Ah! here is Cousin Boram; now let me see you make a good meal, or I won't trust my patient to your care!"

And when Ione had broken her fast, the nurse went to her own room, to snatch a little necessary rest; and the girl watched beside

the man she loved, praying all the while in her heavy heart that Heaven would be merciful to him and to her.

Day followed day in slow, sad succession. Sometimes they feared Arnold was dead, he lay so motionless; and, at such times, Ione would pace to and fro, clasping her burning temples with trembling hands. Not crying or sobbing, because her anguish was too great to admit of weeping.

And then, one blessed morning, as she sat alone by his bed, he opened his eyes and knew her. A look of surprise, not unmingled with pleasure, crossed his face, and he put out a feeble hand. She took and clasped it in her own, but not a word did she speak, remembering Dr. Rymore's instructions. But a great and tremulous joy possessed her; he would live, and perhaps—not all at once, but by slow degrees—he would learn to love her and understand all her devotion to him.

She watched with almost maternal care whilst he fell asleep, a faint smile playing about his mouth; and from that hour his recovery was sure though slow. Not a word had passed between them as to her coming; but she knew that his eyes followed her with pleasure, and that his weak voice took a tenderer tone when he addressed her, and she was almost content to wait for the love to come. One day she had been reading to him, when he said suddenly,—

"What has become of Garwood? Do you know, Miss Ione?"

"I saw him on the day that I came to Haddington. I have heard nothing of him since. It was he who wounded you?"

"Yes, but it was in a fair fight, and I was the one to plan it. He was not to blame, poor brute! He was mad with misery; and I was bent upon revenging her wrongs. I could not think that she had ever given him cause for offence. I see now what a fool I was. I ought never to have interferred between them—and she, if she loved once, would love for all time. Poor soul! I wonder does she know the truth!"

"No, I have never breathed it to her; I have never told her that I have seen Mortimer; she believes him still prosperous and unforlorn."

Silence for awhile, then Arnold said,—

"How did you learn about my—my accident?"

"Through the medium of the newspapers."

"Why did you come?" he asked, and gently touched her hand.

Over face and brow rushed the burning blood.

"Do not ask!"

"But I must, Ione, why should you, of all I know, leave everything for my sake? I had deserved nothing of you. I had persecuted Hester and neglected you. Why was it, Ione?"

She snatched her hand away, and hid her troubled face; then rising, she went hastily to the window, and he felt rather than saw that she was crying.

"I want to speak to you," he said, "and how can I do so when you stand at such a distance—and my voice is so weak? Come here, Ione, kneel down, so that your face is level with mine."

Trembling in every limb, she obeyed; he put one weak hand beneath her chin, and looked earnestly into her shy eyes.

"Was it because you loved me, dear? May I hope so much?"

She hid her face in the coverlet and wept aloud.

"You say this because you have guessed my secret, and are sorry for me," she sobbed.

"Oh! let me go away, you can spare me now!"

"I am not so sure of that, Ione; having been so petted and spoiled by you, I am afraid I should never again be content with the old life. See, dear, I do not profess to care for you as a little while ago I cared for Hester; but the scales have fallen from my eyes—and I am so grateful to you for your goodness, so sure that I can make your happiness if only you

will say yes, and that in time the love will come, that I am bold to ask you to be my wife. What are you going to say to me, dear?"

She laid her soft cheek to his, and whilst she still wept, but now for very joy, asked,—
"What do you wish me to say?"

"That you love and trust me, that you will be my wife!"

The pretty face, instinct with tenderness, was bowed above his.

"I love you!" she said, scarcely above her breath. "Oh, yes, I love you with all my heart!"

"And you can trust me, knowing all my past as you do?"

"If I did not, I should pray to die!"

"Then kiss me, sweetheart, who is soon to be my wife; there is no other woman who would have done for me what you have done." And as she timidly kissed him, she looked so pretty, so gentle, that he felt it would not be so hard a task to love her. And she—well, she held his hand in a gentle clasp, and watched him as he fell asleep; and all her heart grew soft, and all her conscience cried out to her to send Hester some fond message.

She remembered, with a sudden pang, how her sister had toiled for her early and late, when she herself was but a young thing; and she was ashamed of her base ingratitude and hardness.

That night she wrote Hester, confessing her sins against her, her mad jealousy, her knowledge of Mortimer's position, her culpable ignorance of his present whereabouts, and ended with a wild petition for pardon.

Poor Hester! it almost broke her heart to think of her husband as poor—perhaps starving—and, even to her generous nature, it was difficult to forgive Ione's cruel conduct; and to herself she said,—

"It is all my fault; I should have been more patient. I should have kept more loyalty to my marriage vows."

To Arnold lying on his sick bed it occurred that Ione had risked even her good name in coming to his rescue, and had counted the world's opinion as naught for his sake.

His heart was very tender towards her then. (In a little while he would love her well and wonder over his previous infatuation.) What recompense could he give her?

Should he permit her to return to her old life, endure the ill-natured criticisms of her acquaintances. A thousand times no. So that night, as he held her hand, he said,—

"Ione, Rymore tells me I may get up to-morrow; in a few days I may go out. Don't you think our first journey should be to church? I am not going back to town without my wife!"

She looked at him startled and trembling.

"Oh, Arnold! So soon?"

"A good deed cannot be done too early," smiling. "You love me—you have full confidence in me? What reason is there to delay our marriage?"

"None," she was obliged, timidly, to confess.

"Then make your preparations as quickly as possible. They won't be very arduous, seeing how quiet a wedding ours will be."

And so a week later they were married.

CHAPTER VII.

In her newborn happiness Ione went to Hester.

"Let us be friends," she said, and, although she had suffered cruelly because of her sister, Hester had no harsh word to say; her only reproach was, "Why did you not tell me all the truth long ago, Ione? I might have found my poor boy then. Now, whilst I live in luxury, he may even want bread. Oh, my husband! oh, my husband! life is too cruel!" He had been harsh and unjust to her. He had driven her from home by his persistent ill-temper and caprice, and yet she loved him.

She harboured no angry thought against

him. Oh, love of woman passing all understanding! Oh, patience exceeding all comprehension!

"Ione," she said, "you should not have kept these things from me; and forgive me if I say that my husband did not sin against Arnold Claremont when he met him face to face. Let the matter rest there. You are happy; I pray you always may be so. We shall not often meet. In your new and prosperous life you will half forget me and my woes. It is better so; and as for me—as for me, I have but one purpose in life, and that is to find Mortimer!"

So they parted, and Ione went on her bridal tour, scarce remembering the sister whose love had been her shield; and Hester spent a small fortune in advertising. She worded all her appeals so that Mortimer and Mortimer only would understand them. But no answer ever came—he did not see the papers then, he had no money to expend upon them. Only as some consolation to him in his bitter need and sorrow he learned that Claremont lived, and that he had made Ione his wife.

He felt more at rest after that. He could face the world again free, thank Heaven, of bloodguiltiness. And so with renewed courage he set to work to find employment.

But there seemed no opening for him. There were so many applicants, so few vacancies; and, presently, when hope was dead in his heart, and pride was humbled to the very dust, he would have been glad to obtain the merest wage, the most menial labour, but even that was denied him.

One by one his little possessions found their way to the pawnbroker's, until he had nothing left that the Hebrew would advance a penny upon.

Then he felt the end was near. Yet night after night he dragged his weary limbs to the theatre doors, and watched her enter and return. He knew every line and change of that dear face, as he never had known it in his happier days.

She never saw him as she swept by him in her velvet and furs. She passed him often, so close he could have touched her, but how was she to guess that that shabby crouching figure was her husband's, that those hungry eyes, and that wasted face were Mortimer's?

And then there came a day when he found himself utterly penniless. He had nothing left to pawn or sell; he had not tasted food for twenty-four bitter hours; he was weak and ill; he could not think collectedly; he scarce could drag his weary limbs along.

Ah, well, there was the river! But first he would see her, and in his heart wish her good-bye. Then he would go away, and after that she would be free.

And so that night he made his slow and painful journey to her house. He crept to the door, and then, with a low moan of bitterest pain and shame, he sank exhausted upon the steps.

A little later, Hester came home; and dismissing her carriage, drew up her skirts, and went towards the house. As the door opened to her, the light revealed a prostrate form, shabbily and insufficiently clad.

She shrank back, thinking perhaps a drunken tramp had taken refuge there; then gathering courage, she went nearer, caught the outline of his face, and knew, all in a moment, that Mortimer had come back to her. She flung herself down upon her knees, there in the snow, beside him.

"Husband! husband!" she wailed, "speak to me! speak to me—your wicked, unhappy, despairing wife. Will you ever forgive me, my dear, my dear?" and when he did not answer, all her strength forsook her, so that she wept like a beaten child, and kissed him madly between her tears.

Her servants came out to her, she lifted her head then.

"This is your master," she said, simply. "Carry him to my room; and you, Jenkins, go for a doctor."

She followed them upstairs. With tender

hands she ministered to his comfort. All his shortcomings were forgotten, all his harshness blotted out. He was her husband, and that was all she remembered. The doctor came, ordering every nourishment.

"He is half-starved!" he said, and the heart within her bled, when she thought how luxuriously she had lived whilst he went hungry.

When he woke to consciousness, she was bending over him, and her eyes were full of tenderness. She sank on her knees beside him.

"Forgive me," she said, brokenly. "Oh! love of my heart, forgive me! I thought I was acting for the best, and now I shall never forgive myself for my intolerance and cruelty!"

As she knelt and wept, he laid one thin hand upon her head.

"I am not worthy so much as to look upon you. In the old days I was a devil to you, and you repay all my brutality with goodness and gentleness. Hester! Hester! why do not you curse me?"

"I love you!" she answered. "I love you! Let us kiss and forget all the evil that has come and gone; and till you are strong again, it shall be my joy to work for you. Here—here, on my breast, dear heart, find again the peace we both have lost so long! Let me toil for you, watch by you, serve you from morn to night, year in and year out. Only love me, and I shall be content!"

Only love her! Oh, great Heaven! how could he now prove she was dear to him? Weak, prostrate, penniless as he was, what could he do to prove his devotion? Nothing! nothing! His days of labour were over, never any more could he serve her. All through his life, although he did not then know it, he must be a burden upon her.

Year in and year out he would lie helpless upon his couch whilst she cheerfully laboured for him, until he came to know her as she was in all the beauty and purity of her nature, until he came to glorify her as a saint, and learned at last the littleness of his own nature, and the worth of woman's love!

And Hester? Well her husband was given back to her arms, and though life could never be very glad to either of them again, yet she was not wholly unhappy.

"Through passionate duty love springs higher." And in performance of her duty, and tender care of her husband, she found the only joy left to her. And he? Well he worshipped her now; but none the less her life was a tragedy, only no one knew it save herself and Heaven!

[THE END.]

THE native Andamanese women have a curious custom. When any of them are left widows, the bereaved wife is accustomed to procure the skull of her late husband, and carry it about with her suspended by her side. She also uses it as a sort of treasure-box, placing in it her money, jewels, or any other valuable article she may have.

THE *Kölnische Volkszeitung* says that those who pass a field of oats this year near Cologne will, perhaps, notice that most of the ears have a curious mark upon them, exactly like a B, more or less distinctly imprinted. The peasants declare that the letter stands for "blood," and that whenever it appears in the oats a war is certain to occur in the same year.

THE Zaparos, a tribe of South America, have a curious way of courting. The love-stricken young man goes out hunting, and, on his return, throws his game at the feet of the young lady who has smitten him, together with a sufficient quantity of fuel to cook it. If she takes up the game, lights a fire and commences to cook it, he knows his suit is accepted; but if not, he turns away, a sadder, if not a wiser man.

FACETIE.

THE man who doesn't think his baby is the prize baby hasn't got any baby.

"MAX I kiss you just once?" he asked. "No," she replied. "How many times?" he asked, unabashed.

HE: "I never saw clothing so cheap as it is now. Any man can dress like a gentleman." SHE: "Yes, indeed. So can the ladies."

PAT AGAIN.—An Irish lover remarked, "It's a very great pleasure to be alone, especially when your sweetheart is wid' ye."

AN Irishman writing a sketch of his life, says that he ran away early from his father because he discovered he was only his uncle.

TOURIST: "Do you stop here long for luncheon?" BRKESMAN: "We do, unless you insist on eating a whole sandwich."

THIRSTY LADY: "Is there any water aboard?" CAPTAIN (excursion boat): "Only 'bout four feet, mum; but please don't tell anybody."

DE BEERE: "Your picture has one quality at least, that of innocence." DE Smeere: "Innocence?" DE Beere: "Yes, it is so art-less."

SHE: "I don't see why women shouldn't make as good swimmers as men." HE: "Yes, but you see a swimmer has to keep his mouth shut."

JUDGE: "I understand that you prefer charges against this man?" GROCER: "No, sir; I prefer cash, and that's what I had him brought here for."

A HASTY REMARK.—He: "No; my music isn't good enough to publish." SHE: "But they publish a great deal of wretched trash, you know."

A HORSE OF ANOTHER KIND.—"And Jones is ruined?" "He is." "Betting on fast horses, I suppose?" "No; betting on slow ones."

NOT HOME GROWN.—Edith: "How I hate that Mrs. Hifler! I should like to pull her hair out by the roots." Ethel: "But her hair doesn't have any roots."

IT is not safe to gauge a man's courage by the tone of voice he employs when he speaks to the office-boy. Wait till you hear him address his wife.

SHE: "It's a bull, and he's coming right at us! What shall we do?" HE: "Well, don't stand there doing nothing. Come and help me to climb this tree."

BEAU: "Oh, I have taken your father's hat instead of my own." SHE (glancing at the clock): "I don't wonder at the mistake, it's so long since you had yours on."

MA: "What do you mean by dropping crackers out of the window on passers-by?" BOBBIE: "Why, didn't you tell me not to fire them off in the house?"

AN American doctor proscribes a mixture of diethylsulphondimethylmethane and trichloroacetyl dimethylphenylpyrazolone for warts. Most people would prefer to keep the warts.

"You are out with Miss Rox!" "Yes, her father put an extinguisher on the affair." "You've done sparking, then?" "No, I've gone back to an old flame."

OUT OF THE REACH OF ANNOYANCE.—Summer Boarder: "You told me last spring that you were never annoyed by mosquitoes here." Mr. Haicede: "Wal, we hain't. We're used to 'em."

A CERTAIN country sexton, in making his report of burials, is explicit to a commendable degree. For instance, such entries as this occur:—Died, John Smith, male; aged three days; unmarried.

ASPIRING AUTHOR: "Of course you are fond of poetry, are you not, Miss Whipperley?" Miss Whipperley: "My maid is, I believe; but let us talk of something serious. Tell me about the entries for the dog show."

"WHAT is a promoter?" asks a subscriber of the Seattle Press, and that paper responds: "A promoter is a man who makes his living advising you to put your money into schemes that he wouldn't invest his money in."

"Now, children," said the teacher, "whatever you sow, that shall you also reap. If you sow dandelion-seeds, you will get dandelions." "Yes," said a puzzled child; "but if we sow bird-seed, shall we get birds?"

"THIS dress shows my figure admirably," she remarked as she twisted her head to look in the mirror behind her. "Yes," replied her husband, "and the cheque it calls for does the same for me."

"Oh, Tommy," said the little girl in awe-some tones, "I know something awful about our Sunday-school superintendent." "Tell me," said Tommy. "Don't you never tell—but I saw him—I saw him laughin' to-day."

Two women were talking of a third. "She's misplaced her affections," said the first in a sympathetic tone. "Isn't that like her?" said the other seriously. "I never knew her to have anything in the right place."

A DREAMY PROSPECT.—First Tramp (glancing over a bit of paper): "Say, Mike, here's a new society a startin' up, ter furnish work fer th' idle." Second Tramp: "Things is gettin' so there ain't no comfort fer a gentleman nowhere."

Why do people wait until a man is sick and can't eat to send him good things? When he is well and would like something good, no neighbour comes in with fancy jellies, old wines and things like that. Things are very unfair.

"Do you find enough to keep you busy these days, Jim?" "You bet. I'm putting in a bigger day's work these days than I ever did before." "Why, I thought you'd given up your job." "So I did. I'm looking for another."

HE put his arm around her waist for the first time, but realising his boldness quickly withdrew it. "Are you angry with me, Annie?" he asked timidly. "Of course I am, Jack," she answered. "What business had you to take away your arm?"

ON TOUR WITH A CIRCUS.—"Smith has left the city, I understand. What is he doing now?" "He is travelling with a circus." "Pretty hard work, isn't it?" "No, he has nothing to do but stick his head in the lion's mouth twice a day."

"THERE is one face that is always before me," said Clarence, as he stroked the golden locks of his month-old wife. "And that is—" And then the timid creature hung her dainty head, while the heartless wretch whispered: "My own."

MISTRESS (to waitress): "How is this, Jane, we have but two chops?" JANE: "If you please, ma'am, Bridget says as how you didn't order enough meat for both tables, and it gives her a sick headache to do with less than three chops for her lunch."

"I SEE, fraulein," said the professor, "that my remarks on the ancient Romans do not interest you." "Ah, yes," replied the hostess, wearily, "pray go on." "No," said the professor, kindly, "I shall change the subject. We will now consider the ancient Greeks."

JONES: "By jove, Brown, what has become of your hair?" BROWN: "Oh, it's fallen off. It's an hereditary peculiarity in my family." "But I know several of your relations who don't suffer in that way." "Very likely. But don't you see, every hereditary peculiarity must have a beginning."

MR. OUTSKIRTS (to wife, who is driving some chickens out of the yard): "Well, I don't see why a woman can't throw a stone. You haven't come within forty feet of one of those hens." Mrs. OUTSKIRTS: "I dropped my sewing in order to drive those hens out, and I think, instead of standing here criticising you might go in and thread a few needles for silk for me."

WIFE: "Did you change the dress pattern and scold the man for the mistake?" HUSBAND: "I had it changed, but the assistant declared that he knew you were wrong." WIFE: "Well, what did you do about it?" HUSBAND (grimly): "I shook hands with him."

"So you are in the multiplication table?" asked little Johnny's father, who was in the clothing line. "How much is twice two?"

"Six." "What? Why, twice two are four." "Yes, papa, but I said six, so that afterwards I could easily come down to four," replied the youth with true business instinct.

"THIS car goes in two minutes," said the conductor. "This car never goes anywhere in two minutes," remarked a self-assertive young lady. "It's slow and sure," said a corner passenger. "Sure of not getting there," retorted the young woman, who had the last word.

MAGISTRATE: "The police found you in the act of stretching out your hand." VAGRANT: "That is true." Magistrate: "Then you admit you were begging?" VAGRANT: "Nothing of the kind." Magistrate: "Then, why hold out your hand?" VAGRANT: "To see if it snowed."

A GENTLEMAN was put out of patience by some blunder of his new groom. "Look here!" he cried in his anger. "I won't have things done in this way. 'Do you think I'm a fool?' 'Shure, sorr,' said the groom. 'O! can't say, sorr. O! only came here yesterday.'"

BEGORRA, but I've got the best of that murdering railway this time, anyhow!" said a Hibernian, who had a grudge against the company in question. "How is that, Dennis?" asked a bystander. "I bought a return ticket, and faith I'm not coming back at all at all!" was the triumphant reply.

MAMMA (after the elderly visitor had gone away): "You shouldn't have run out of the room when Miss Oldeby tried to take you on her lap, Willie. She was not going to harm you." Willie: "She wasn't, hey? She had her mouth puckered all ready for it, anyhow."

SYMPATHETIC OLD LADY (to convict): "Ah, my unfortunate friend, your fate is indeed a hard one; and, as she thinks of you here in this dreadful place, how your wife must suffer." Convict (very much affected): "Wh-which one, mum? I'm here for bigamy."

MR. HANKINSON lifted the young lady's little brother in his arms and tossed him up in the air. "Say, Irene," cried out Johnny, after this performance had been repeated several times, "he's got a little place on the back part of his head just like my china saucer!" And then Mr. Hankinson put little Johnny down.

SWEET GIRL (at eighteen): "Oh, it's just lovely to receive so much attention! That horrid Miss Pert will go just wild with envy when she hears that five gentlemen called on me this evening." Same Girl (at nineteen): "Oh, it just drives me wild! Every time he calls some other man has to come poking in to spoil the whole evening."

AT THE BALL.—"My hat, please?" "Here, sir." "That isn't mine." "Excuse me. Here it is." "That isn't it either." "This one, then. No! What kind of a hat was it?" "A new one with white silk lining." "What! A new hat at two o'clock! I ask your pardon, but here all the new hats go away before twelve."

At a school in the North of England, during a lesson on the animal kingdom, the teacher put the following question: "Can any boy name to me an animal of the order edentata that is a front toothless animal?" A boy (whose face beamed with pleasure at the prospect of a good mark) replied, "I can." "Well, what is the animal?" "My grandmother," replied the boy, with great glee.

SOCIETY.

THE illness of Dom Pedro of Brazil has been much exaggerated, and all possible cause for alarm has now subsided.

THE Kaiser will pay a long visit to this country again next year, and in all probability will stay at Balmoral for a time.

AMONG the multifarious presents received by the little Fife baby were nine cradles, some of them costly affairs in ebony and gold.

THE Servians are delighted to hear that King Milan has betaken himself to Carlsbad, where they hope he will long remain, for there is no gambling there.

THE Prince of Naples speaks English almost as perfectly as he does Italian, and although he looks delicate, his health is, as a matter of fact, exceptionally robust.

PRINCESS VICTORIA of Schleswig-Holstein has felt the separation from her sister very keenly. They have always been most deeply attached to one another, and, till Princess Aribert married, have never been separated for a day.

FOR an old lady, the Queen writes remarkably clearly and well, despite the fact that she is obliged to sign some hundreds of documents daily, and that her private correspondence is very extensive.

THE Czarina always wears light dresses, with lace or embroidered skirts, at the early meal. She is fond of Parisian elegance, and knows how to combine the simplicity of an austere princess with the greatest luxury.

THE shape of some of the new garments for men in Paris is eccentric in the extreme. There is a jacket buttoned at the waist, with bagues as long as a frock coat, and a hat with a broad brim and a low crown that reminds one fearfully of a bishop's head-covering.

A RELIC of the Old Palace of Westminster, destroyed by fire in 1834, has been placed in the hands of the Speaker, and will in turn be presented by Mr. Peel to the Commons. It is the key formerly used at the beginning of every session during the inspection of the vaults of the House—a ceremony dating back to the Gunpowder Plot. The key is of iron, sixteen inches long and jointed in the centre, and is in excellent preservation.

THE hunting lodge at Meyerling, where the Crown Prince Rudolph died, has by the orders of the Emperor of Austria, undergone a transformation which renders it absolutely unrecognisable. It is now surrounded by a high wall, above which nothing can be seen except the cupola surmounting the mortuary chamber. Within this enclosure twenty cells have been erected for the accommodation of an aristocratic band of Carmelite nuns, who have devoted themselves to the melancholy task of guarding the memorial chapel, where numerous masses for the repose of the dead Prince's soul are said daily.

"DISTINCTIVE" weddings in which some flower with harmonising dresses characterises the costumes of bride, bridegroom, and others present are the last mode in matrimonial arrangements. The forget-me-not wedding is one of the prettiest. The bride, in ivory silk, carries a bouquet of forget-me-nots and lilies. The bridesmaids wear gowns of blue and white chiffon, and carry bouquets principally composed of forget-me-nots, tied with ribbons of the same hue; and the little flower is made up into elaborate *boutonnieres* for the men.

FROM the age of ten the young Prince of Naples was made to rise at daybreak, summer and winter alike. After taking his cold bath and a cup of broth, he commenced his lessons. If perchance he lingered two or three minutes in bed before getting up, he was not allowed to get his cup of broth until after his first lesson was over. On the conclusion of his lesson he was made to ride for an hour, whatever the weather might be; and the whole day was spent in study and physical exercise.

STATISTICS.

AN average man can lift two and a half times his own weight.

A YORKSHIRE collier raises about two tons of coal a day.

LONDON in monetary value is worth two and a half times as much as Paris.

WE import (so the *Horticultural Times* says) 3,250,000 of eggs every working day.

A FULL GROWN bird stands from six to seven feet in height, and weighs from 250 to 300 pounds.

THERE are 3,000,000 more persons in England and Wales to-day than there were ten years ago; but there are nearly 20,000 fewer paupers and 2,000 fewer convicted criminals.

GEMS.

LYING is the basis of all evil. After one year of absolute truth, crime would disappear.

WE never feel so sympathetic for a friend in his troubles as when he remembers to ask about ours.

TIME is the greatest of all tyrants. As we go on towards age he taxes our health, limbs, faculties, strength and features.

PATIENCE strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles agony, extinguishes envy, subdues pride; it bridges the tongue, restrains the hand, and tramples upon temptations.

BEWARE of three women. The one who does not love children, the one who does not love flowers, and she who openly declares she does not like other women. There is something wanting in such, and in all probability its place is supplied by some unlovely trait.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A VERY simple but delicious way of cooking salmon is to cut it in slices and grill it, serving it at once with a good squeeze of lemon juice and a dust of cayenne on each slice.

PINE-APPLE BREE.—Peel a pine-apple and cut it in thin slices, and put it in a deep dish. Cover them with fine sugar and let them stand for four hours. Put the rind into a small stewpan with as much water as will cover it, bring it to the boil, skim, and pour it over the fruit. Add six ounces of sugar and a bottle of light wine. Cover it over and let stand two hours. When wanted for use stir well, and add a bottle of seltzer water.

SAUSAGE SALAD.—Wash a good cos lettuce in several waters, and drain it quite dry on a clean napkin. Break the leaves into shapely pieces, and lay them on a dish with alternate layers of small pieces of the white part of cold roast chicken and slices of cooked pork sausages. Wreath the whole with mustard and cress, then make a chain of the white of the eggs, cut into rings, across the top. Just before serving pour over it whatever dressing is liked and garnish with slices of pickled beet-root.

TOMATO SOUP.—A good roast beef or other bone, one onion, one breakfast cup of tinned tomato, one dessertspoonful of dripping, a bit of carrot and turnip, one tablespoonful of flour, one tea-cup of milk. Put the bone on with ten breakfast-cups water to boil, then add the carrot and turnip cut up, let it boil three hours and strain it. Put the dripping in a stewpan, chop the onion and put it in among it to stew for ten minutes, then add the tomatoes and stew for a quarter of an hour with the lid on, stirring often. Rub all this through a strainer and put it among the stock, and put on the lid to boil. Mix the flour with the milk, put it in and boil five minutes, add salt and pepper, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ONLY one man in 203 is over 6 feet in height. THREE pints of liquid a day is sufficient for the average adult.

THE majority of the clergy are abstainers and non-smokers.

THE average person wears nearly 14 lbs. of clothing.

SOME insects are in a state of maturity thirty minutes after birth.

BERLIN women have formed a league to wage war on the corset.

THE apple is mentioned by Herodotus 484 years before Christ, and by Theophrastus 287 years before Christ.

NOTHING on earth will upset a horse's stomach. This is not because the horse does not feel pain, but simply because the horse has no gall bladder.

THE oath was first administered in judicial proceedings in England by the Saxons in 600. The words "So help me, God, and all saints!" concluded an oath until 1550.

IN France licences are now issued to women to wear male costume. The applicant has only to show good reason, and her request is granted as a matter of course.

THE breva was the shortest of the three notes used in ancient music; it is the longest of the notes used now, and rarely appears but in chants, etc. It is, of course, as long as two semibreves.

THERE are 70 peoples whose customs forbid the wife's relatives to hold any communications with her husband, or, conversely, the husband's relatives and his wife to speak to one another.

BOOTS and shoes may be rendered permanently waterproof by soaking them for some hours in thick soap water. A fatty acid is forced in the leather by the soap, which makes it impervious to water.

FROM a work on Hindoo folk-lore, we learn that if a person is drowned, struck by lightning, bitten by a snake, or poisoned, or loses his life by any kind of accident, or by suicide, then he goes usually to hell.

A PUBLIC schoolmaster of nine years standing says that not once in his experience has the full number of pupils turned up. There always seems to be a certain percentage away.

A WELL-KNOWN soap firm has hit upon the idea of having its name on the top of its vases as well as on the sides; so that as the vehicle makes its journey people in the top storeys of houses can see the name.

AT Cotta, in Saxony, those persons who have not paid their taxes of the preceding year are advertised in a list which is hung up in all restaurants and saloons of the city. Those that are on the list can get neither meat nor drink at such places of refreshment.

"PLAYS without words" are in future to be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, that dignitary deputing a Reader to witness a special rehearsal of each piece. It is to be hoped that the reader will not attach any importance to the language of the stage-manager between the acts.

AMONG numerous curiosities in the British Museum the most remarkable is a Chinese bank note of the Ming Dynasty, about 1368, a comparatively modern specimen for China, but 300 years older than the first bank-note issued in Europe. No example of any other early issue is known to exist.

ARTIFICIAL blacklead pencils were made by an ingenious Frenchman named Conte so far back as 1795; and the inventor afterwards, turning his attention to the fabrication of chalk for drawing purposes, produced those "Conte crayons" of different shades which are known throughout the civilised world, and which still hold their own in the shop of every English artist colourman.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

WAVERTLEY.—Boots for the army are made almost exclusively in Northampton.

AMERICAN GIRL.—German Emperor was in this country in his youth; never until now since he came to his present rank.

DISTRESSED NAIL.—A governess is not a menial servant; and unless so agreed upon, she can neither leave nor be dismissed at a month's notice.

INVENTOR.—The article is not in special request. It would not pay to patent it, and you should not venture your money upon it. Rather try to sell to a toy-maker.

MAKING.—You will find your silk much more useful if cleaned, as it is too thin to dye well. If dyed, it must be artificially stiffened, and this will spoil it.

NEMO.—Borax and camphor is a very useful wash for hair affected with dandruff, but only cleanses at the time, and does not effect a cure.

YOUNG HOUSEWIFE.—Soap lasts much longer if bought by the quantity, cut in blocks, and kept in a dry place to harden.

AFFLICTED ONE.—It is said that eczema may be cured by applying a coating of flowers of sulphur to the afflicted limb.

FANNY.—After exposure to sun and wind, or when the skin is heated, nothing is more refreshing than a few drops of toilet vinegar in the washing water.

JACK.—The owner of the horse and carriage let for hire is, in general, liable for any accident which may befall them, when fairly used by the hirer.

CARL.—There is no one word used to describe a man who has divorced his wife. The woman divorced is sometimes spoken of as a *divorcée*.

AN INVENTOR.—You can obtain all information as to how to procure a patent by applying to the Patent Office, 25, Southampton Buildings, London, E.C.

IGNORAMUS.—The Scotch railway strike began December 22, 1890; and ended, with a compromise, January 29, 1891.

IRATE LANDLORD.—A tenant has no right on leaving to remove anything that is planted in the garden. The landlord can proceed against him for damages for so doing.

L. F.—By the terms of the Act, "every person who uses or has for use for trade"—whether buying or selling—a false or unjust weight, is liable to a penalty of £5 for the first, and £20 for the second offence.

A RATEPAYER.—We do not know that any county councilors receive travelling expenses, or are allowed refreshments at the ratepayers' cost. There is nothing in the Act of Parliament to authorize such payments.

A READER.—The subjects named by you have been treated by several writers, and the books may be obtained through any bookseller. We cannot in this column advertise wants.

LEWELLYN.—The name of the composer of "The March of the Men of Harlech" has not been preserved. It is an ancient Welsh melody recorded in Edward Jones's "Relicks of Welsh Bards," published in 1794.

E. R. S.—A person committed to prison for contempt of court in not obeying a judgment order may be again proceeded against, and re-committed, if the judge thinks fit. Imprisonment does not discharge the debt.

PUBLISHER.—We do not know of any law to hinder a publisher from putting in his window articles of sale, such articles not being connected with his business as a publisher.

ETIQUETTE.—Cannot answer. The case is decided in accordance with the rules of the society, and we have not these before us. You are held in law to have accepted them when you joined.

LADDIE.—We advise the lad to go in the meantime to school to study as many branches as he can overtake. In another year he may be better able to say what profession his mind lies to.

LAUREA.—The 21st June fell previously to this year on a Sunday in 1885, 1874, 1868, 1857, 1845, 1835, 1819, 1807, 1801. It will happen next in 1905, 1914, 1925, 1901, 944, etc.

FRITE.—The duel between M. Floquet and General Boulanger occurred on July 13, 1889. It was on July 12 that General Boulanger resigned his seat in the French Chambers, because a motion of his had been rejected.

NOVICE.—Verdigris is a rank poison, and as it often forms in copper kettles in which anything sour is cooked, great care should be taken in cleaning such vessels. All copper vessels should be tinned.

IN DESPAIR.—You committed a blunder, and will have to abide by it, unless you can persuade some mutual friend to intercede for you and help to correct the bad impression you made upon the lady.

BRIDAL.—The ordinary costume for a gentleman at a wedding is black frock-coat, white waistcoat, light trousers and tie, and lavender kid gloves. Dress coats have not been worn for many years at these functions.

PARTY POLLY.—A domestic servant who refuses to obey the lawful orders of her employer is liable to dismissal without notice. She can, of course, bring an action for wages in lieu of notice, and it is then for the judge to decide if the disobedience was sufficient to justify summary dismissal.

QUEST.—Taking the sexes in mass, women are longer lived than men. In "Whitaker's Almanack" (pp. 353-4) you will find tables showing the expectation of life of males and females at various ages.

A DEBTOR.—The debt will have to be paid out of your estate before any of the legacies are paid, unless the creditor choose to forego it, or neglect to claim its payment.

ROSA DARTLE.—The Queen can make a will disposing of her money and other private possessions, but she is not bound, like other subjects, to register or make its contents public.

A DOG-LOVER.—Only a shepherd or farmer can have a dog without a licence; a rat-catcher (who does not necessarily require a dog) must pay licence for every animal he keeps.

AN INQUIRER.—The thing cannot be done except you choose to take your umbrella apart as is done with a dress; probably in the end you will realize that you would have been cheaper and better with a new umbrella.

TED.—We could not possibly give the detailed information desired, nor are we able to say how you can obtain it except by personal application or correspondence with the various companies near to you.

THE MIDSHIPMATE.—Lord Nelson was born at Burnham Thorpe, a village in the county of Norfolk, where his father was an English Church clergyman; both father and mother were English.

A SOLDIER'S LAMB.—If you have not the man's regimental number or the number of his company, we do not think you can reach him by letter, except his name is a very unusual one.

J. G.—Lancashire is the great manufacturing county of England, and practically the richest in the country; its annual value is £21,901,546; that of Kent is only £5,181,002.

TO MY LOVE.

If I were the light of the brightest star
That shines in the south now,
I would tremble down from my home afar
And kiss thy radiant brow.

If I were the breath of a fragrant flower,
With a wondrous wing and free,
I would steal away from the fairest bower,
And carry the sweets to thee.

If I were the soul of bewitching song,
With a moving, melting tone,
I would float from the gay and careless throng,
To soothe thy soul alone.

If I were a charm by a fairy wrought,
I would bind thee by a sign,
And never again should a gloomy thought
O'ershadow thy spirit's shrine.

If I were hope blessed with magic light,
That makes the future fair,
I would make thy life on earth as bright
As the ways of angels are.

A. L. D.

BERYL.—Vulcanite is not varnished; it is polished, usually with water-of-Ayr stone or rottenstone and water, and finally with lampblack and oil; it would not pay you to undertake repolishing your goods.

HANAPACK.—We should say, give the trousers to a dyer, or the probability is you will spoil them for after wear; but get a packet of diamond dye at a chemist's, and follow instructions, if you are determined on dyeing or falling in the attempt.

M. A.—Captain Barclay, for a wager on which many thousands of pounds depended, walked 1,000 miles in 1,000 successive hours, each mile in each hour, in 42 days and nights, less eight hours; his task was accomplished on 10th July, 1890.

SWEET-TOOTH.—Loaf sugar is the purest of all varieties, great care being taken to remove the last trace of uncrystallizable sirup and colouring matter. It is very white and hard, and is almost chemically pure cane sugar.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—You have no concern with your father's will until he dies, and in the meantime he can make a new will once a week if he pleases. You are sufficiently protected by law against your husband's interference with what may come to you.

T. B.—Whoever is administering the will is responsible for seeing that the money is paid over to the persons legally entitled, in due proportion. The amount of legacy duty depends on nearness of relationship to the deceased.

FUSE.—There are many superstitions connected with the cat. In the Middle Ages cats were regarded as the familiars of witches, and from this sprang the popular notion that cats have nine lives. A cat squalling on the house-top was said to be the sign of a death.

RACHEL.—To stain horn in imitation of tortoise-shell, mix an equal quantity of quicklime and red lead with strong soap lye; lay it on the horn with a small brush, in imitation of the mottle of tortoise-shell. When dry, repeat it two or three times.

PERPLEXED.—There would be nothing illegal in the woman marrying in the name by which she was commonly known to her friends and acquaintances. To prevent any future dispute as to inheritance and so on, it would, however, be safer to sign in both names, thus—"Jones," otherwise "Brown."

AMAZON.—The Army of Dahomey, the kingdom on the west coast of Africa, and second only to Ashantee in power and importance, was formerly held in high repute, but its prowess, it is now thought, was much overrated. The Amazons form the flower of the army.

REX.—The coin is Belgian. The French words on one side mean: "Leopold First, King of the Belgians;" on the other side: "Union makes"—something, probably "strength"—"2 centimes." Leopold was premier from 1831 to 1865.

GILBERT.—The "freedom of a city" is merely a formal matter, and conveys no rights or privileges. The many reform bills of these later years, extending the franchise and redistributing the constituencies, have completely deprived the freedom of any practical value.

FELIX.—Write to Probate Registry, Somerset House, London, giving name of deceased and his residence at time of death. Cost of will is according to its length, so much per page; send stamped envelope, asking to be informed what sum you are to forward for the copy desired.

ROTHSCHILD.—Ruthe presided over lyric poetry, and played on the flute, of which she is said to have been the inventor. She is generally represented as crowned with flowers, with a flute in her hand, or various musical instruments around her. She is also represented as dancing. She was one of the nine muses.

PANORAMA.—The Ghats gradually extended to the mountains themselves, consist of two great chains extending along the east and west coasts of the Deccan, parallel to each other, or rather diverging, and leaving between them and the sea only a plain of forty or fifty miles in breadth.

CHARINGTOWN.—You can, if you please, assume another surname in addition to that by which you are commonly known. The usual course is to register in the Court of Chancery a deed setting forth the change of name, or to give notice of the change to all persons likely to be concerned by it.

L. B.—Our Government has now concluded extradition treaties for the surrender of criminals with practically all civilized Governments; it is commonly supposed (says an authority on the subject) that some countries, Spain for example, afford a safe refuge for British criminals; but the Government concluded an extradition treaty with Spain in 1878.

AN ENGLISHMAN.—It was left to the school children of the State of New York to decide whether the rose or the golden rod should be the flower of the Empire State. A vote was accordingly taken in the 115 school commissioner districts in the State, with the result that 294,816 children voted for the rose and 336,402 for the golden rod, giving a majority of 38,414 children in favour of the rose, which will henceforward be the flower of New York State.

ANXIOUS FATHER.—Let him go; if he behaves himself he is where he can make money by his good behavior; he will return seven years hence, still a young man, well disciplined, with a good bit of money standing at his call, and with an amount of well-earned experience that should guide him in putting it into business; bring him home now, and he may grow up an idle loafer with no definite aim in life; it would cost £18 to buy him off, and even with that you must get the consent of the commanding officer; that may be refused.

FAIRY.—The alluring of looking-glasses is often done by coating the glass with an amalgam. For this purpose a large, perfectly flat stone is provided; upon it is evenly spread a sheet of tin-foil without a crack or flaw; this is covered uniformly to the depth of one-eighth of an inch with clean mercury. The plate of glass, perfectly cleaned from all grease and impurity, is floated on to the mercury carefully, so as to exclude all air bubbles. It is then pressed down by loading it with weights, in order to press out all the mercury which remains fluid, which is received in a gutter around the stone. After about twenty-four hours it is raised gently upon its edge, and in a few weeks it is ready to frame.

INDIGNANT.—You are evidently in the belief which is shared by many that a medical man is legally bound to attend a person in sickness when called upon to do so; in reality, as far as legal obligation goes, he is no more under compulsion than a grocer is to send provisions to an address when ordered of him by a stranger; there is, however, a well-understood rule of the profession which holds him bound to render his services when required, without regard to the quality of the applicant, and unquestionably he will render himself liable in damages should any harm result from his failing to attend when he has promised to do so, or from his desertion of a case after taking it in hand; he is then in the position of one who breaks a contract.

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††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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